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Archie P. McKishnie

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*By*

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BOSTON & NEW YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
*The Riverside Press Cambridge*
1918

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*Published May 1918*

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## CHAPTER I

TARDILY the cloud gates, far eastward, opened to a new-born day; liquid glories licked the tree-spiked horizon. A misty sheen of orange and purple drifted across lake and forest and wiped the last sombre shadows from the mystery-enshrouded world.

Throughout the greening aisles wild life awoke and to the music of God's wind-played organ ascended the chanted thanks of His wild creatures.

Standing on the shore of the lake, a young man watched the wondrous streamers transform his solitude. Upon his bronzed face the morning sunlight lingered, and in his dark, wide-set eyes rested a deep perplexity born of the dumb groping for the solution of what was still to him a mystery. Linked to the wild, he was its worshipper, but one who could read the Lord's Prayer in the lighting skies.

In the faint glow that dawned like a smile of promise — "Our Father which art in heaven —"

With the out-sweeping glory — "Thy kingdom come — "

And with the purple haze on lake and tree-tops, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

And with the pealing of the wind-fingered organ of the forest cathedral —

"For Thine is the kingdom, the Power and the Glory."

So prayed he in his soul to that beautiful Something which was to him a thing as sacred as Motherhood.

Now in the full glow of the morning streamers he stood up, a perfect animal of a man, tall, broad-shouldered, slender-hipped. The muscles on his folded arms swelled in repose beneath his buckskin sleeves. The cords of his massive throat stood out as though chiselled in marble. For long moments he stood motionless, eyes on the unreadable skies; then the grave lines melted from his face and he smiled.

Behind him, a little way into the woods, had issued a faint, purring sound. He waited until it was repeated; then, without turning his head, commanded, "Come here, Lulu."

Straight from out the brown shadows issued the form of an animal, a long animal with short, somewhat grotesque body, round head crowned with tufted ears, and long, heavy legs. It was grey in color, deepening to tawny yellow on the sides and belly. Its tail was short, its eyes large, and the color of pure amber. In its jaws it carried a still fluttering partridge; its whole manner bespoke cringing shame and contrition.

The man turned slowly and let his eyes rest upon the lynx. There was no harshness or disapproval

in the look; only reproach. At the glance the animal's big eyes slowly shifted and the purr became fainter.

"Drop it, Lulu," he ordered in a low voice. The lynx relaxed her hold on the bird and with a cry that was half a snarl, half a whimper, sank to the ground. The partridge, happily a bird capable of withstanding much mauling, fluttered away a few paces and hopped on a log, where it sat swaying giddily for a moment before taking flight. The amber eyes of the big cat followed it hungrily and the sinews of her forelegs twitched ominously, but at a low spoken word from the man she grovelled down again and lay with round head between paws, blinking up at him.

The woodsman stepped over beside her and bending down patted her grey sides. Immediately she broke into a joyous purring and turning over on her back lifted all four paws into the air. The man laughed and grabbing her roughly by the throat shook her from side to side. She snarled and spit and tapped the face held close above her own with great soft paws. She grabbed his hand in her mouth and champed it gently with her teeth. Then, as though fearing she had hurt him, she licked it with her rough tongue.

He gave her a parting shake and stood up. The lynx yawned, showing a huge red cavity spiked with long glistening teeth, and rolled over and over on a bed of newly shooting catnip; but as a bunch of dappled feathers, torn from the released partridge,

came skimming along the sward, she gave a hissing snarl and struck at them viciously, her long claws leaving little black furrows on the face of the sod. Then she sat up moodily, and in the greenish-yellow eyes raised to the accusing ones of her master there lurked a gleam of rebellion.

"Lulu, I'm ashamed of you," said the man sternly. "Go home to your kittens."

Her eyes shifted and she half turned towards the path leading from the lake's edge through the tangle of tamaracks, pausing to cast a look back over her shoulder at him. Her lips were drawn back from her white teeth, her short stub of a tail was lashing angrily. The man took a step towards her, and with a growl she turned and bounded away into the woods.

With a shrug he picked up a cake of soap and towel from the rock and turned towards the path.

The variegated tints of dawn had melted into a dome of blue and gold; the morning winds were wrinkling the face of the lake into millions of tiny waves. Close in along the shore, among the greening rushes, a flock of wood-ducks were feeding clamorously, darting and cross-tagging and diving after the manner of their kind. The man paused for a moment to watch them. One gorgeous little drake, fluttering up above the reeds the better to display his glorious plumage to the dapper little duck he had selected for mate, caught sight of him and gave a little quacking note of recognition.

He answered it, and immediately the whole flock of ducks came spattering, half swimming, half flying, towards him. They settled close in the lake before him in a half circle, squawking, dodging, diving, and clamoring for food. He drew from the pockets of his deer-skin jacket a handful of yellow corn and scattered it among them. As they dived frantically for the sweet morsels, a pair of solemn black ducks winged in from a distant nook of the lake and settled among them with soft-voiced quacks. A pair of hooded mergansers appeared apparently out of nowhere to mingle with the flock. A lonely loon, fishing far out beyond the shallows, came drifting sideways towards the merry feasters.

The man turned his pockets inside out and offered the last kernel. "That's all I have, my beauties," he said. "You'll have to be content with rush-luck till to-morrow, and if you'll take my advice you'll keep a respectable distance out from shore. Can't promise you safety until Lulu has weaned her kittens, so you'd better give the shallows a wide berth. Hello!"

With a chorus of alarmed quacks the wild ducks had sprung to wing and were sweeping towards their rush retreat. The man divined the cause of the disturbance and turned with a frown to find a big grey fox hungrily watching the retreating birds, her family of five half-grown puppies squatted on their haunches close behind her.

"Well," he addressed her, "it seems as though I am to have trouble with all my children this morn-

ing, Spray-Coat. First I find Lulu trying to murder a nesting grouse, and now I find you bent on disorganizing the whole duck colony — you, a royal-born Silver Grey, setting such an example to your puppies. I'm ashamed of you! Don't you get the very best of food, and an abundance of it? I've a good mind to take a stick to you, Mrs. Reynard, and if I find you worrying the ducks I'll certainly do it. Now, you be good or I'll send you away to the man who offered me Five Thousand Dollars for you. Being of royal birth I can't chain you up as I could a common red fox, so I'll take other measures with you if you try to destroy the discipline of Hardwoods Retreat. Now, then, come along to the enclosure, and you'll be lucky if it is n't bread and water for you for two days."

The young foxes were rolling over each other in play, growling and scratching as they romped, all except the small reddish-grey of the family, who sat on his haunches a little apart from the others, his sharp ears pricked forward, his mouth half open in a grin of pleasure.

The woodsman stooped down and picked up the largest of the puppies, — a pure silver-grey who was at that instant worth fifteen hundred dollars, — and turned away up the path. But the mother, her eyes still on the feeding ducks, paid not the slightest heed and made no move to follow him.

"Ho, ho," laughed the man. "So this fine fellow is not the favorite, eh? Well, we'll see if the old rule

of mother love does n't hold good. I guess we know where most of your affection has centred, Mrs. Spray-Coat, don't we, Silo, little chap?"

He made a grab for the runt of the litter, but foxie evaded his clutch and ran whimpering to his mother. She reached down and licked his wistful face and drew back her upper lip in a little snarl when the man reached under her long hair and pulled the whimpering puppy forth.

"I guess you'll come now," he observed as he tucked the baby fox beneath his arm.

With a little whine of disappointment the mother fox followed him, in her wake the four other puppies gambolling and sprawling.

Not until he was some distance into the woods did the man place the baby fox beside its mother. He waited until assured that the queenly Spray-Coat would seek her romping field of the uplands, then he sought a path and followed it until a wide clearing grew up on the greening face of the forest. In a grove of butternut trees stood a roomy cabin built of long tamarack timbers, straight-grained and barked to take on the shellac stain of the elements, and mortised to fit snugly end to end. Its windows were covered with oiled buckskin, scraped thin as parchment, to admit the light. Its big doors had been cut from single blocks of white oak. A smaller cabin, built much after the same style, stood a little distance from it.

In front of the cabins sloped a wide lawn, sur-

rounding which, and thickening to a little forest, stood all manner of beautiful hardwood trees. Beech with sweeping branches, sturdy vindictive-looking oak trees, tall hickories that seemed to frown superciliously upon their fellows, stately walnut and butternut trees, with here and there a gnarled, grouchy-looking scrub oak that seemed to rail at Providence for not giving it the size and stateliness of its neighbors.

This place was called Hardwoods Retreat. The man had built the grand cabins with his own hands, largely. Every tree in that grove was dear to him. He knew all the hardwoods well, indeed; close and intimate association with them for five years had caused him to look upon them as friends. Sometimes he laughed at himself for being so foolish as to believe that he understood their moods and language. Take that tall hickory standing a little apart from its fellows, now. Whenever a storm was brewing, that old tree always shook its branches and sent him word. "Sweesh-e-swosh-sweesh-e-swosh" it would whisper as he passed beneath it. Even when the sky above swam like a sea of robin's-egg blue, and the sun paths streaked the canopy like the spokes of a giant wheel, and not a cloud was anywhere visible in the heavens, that old hickory would often send its agitated message down to him; and he would slap its rough bark and say, "All right, old friend, I'll go gather up my family."

And the gathering up of that family was by no

means easy. The foxes little liked being taken from their sunny beds among the hazel copse, the raccoons did their best to hide from him, the fawns looked their protest at him from wistful eyes, and Lulu, the old lynx, usually spit and growled and otherwise protested against taking her five kittens from the warm sunlight into the dark kennel.

But the man's law was one that must be observed. Once animals and birds were snugly housed, let the storm come. And it came inevitably. The old hickory never lied. Mid-afternoon would mark a filming of the skies and a freshening breeze from off the lake. By and by the sunlight would fade to orange spray and deepen to faint purple, and above the forest would stretch a fleecy archway of cloud that would spread and lower, pausing for one deep, breathless instant as though to command its forces before the fury broke.

Wild storms they usually were, with crashing thunder and hurtling deluge as the barbed clouds sweeping up from far Orinto Lake met those above Tabinstoch as one opposing army meets another. Well had the man learned that it was wise to have all the birds and animals snugly housed before the storm broke.

This morning as he passed up the path to the cabin there was no sign of storm in the air. It was clear and sweet with the nectar of spring. The skies swam with the floral-lined promise of a perfect day and far, far down through the fir-wood thicket,

spreading for mile upon mile across the upland, sounded the voices of happy, mating things.

But as he passed beneath the old hickory he paused suddenly and lifted his head. High, high above him he heard a sleepy whisper, — "Swish-e-swosh-swish-e-swosh," — and he saw a little tremor run through those long, reaching arms spread outward and upward towards the deep purple.

A beautiful, long-haired Irish setter came bounding down the path to meet him, to stand motionless with nerves quivering as he noted the look of intentness on his master's face.

The man smiled down at the dog. "The old tree says storm, Larry," he said, "Better be off and flush up your chickens."

With a whine the dog turned and bounded away. His particular work was to look after the grouse-broods, to which end the man had trained him patiently and well, for assuredly the setter was an adept in gathering the birds.

As the man turned to resume his walk towards the cabin something stirred on a log a little to the left of him, and there stepped from the shadows into the strained sunlight — a girl. Her dress consisted of white doeskin jacket, beaded and fringed, and grey deerskin skirt reaching almost to her shapely ankles. Her hair was dark brown and fell across her wide forehead in fluffy waves. Her eyes were large and as grey as glass gleaming from the bottom of a moss-lined pool. There was that about her face which

made one think of a silent, restful glade in the forest, an expression of placid satisfaction that was belied slightly by the wistfulness of the mouth. Her skin was hazel hued with the warmth of red blood behind it. She may have been seventeen years of age, perhaps older. In the hollow of her left arm she carried a small repeating rifle.

"Well, Willow, the Wisp," laughed the man, drawing her towards him. "How comes it that you are abroad so early? I have been wondering why you have been staying away from the Retreat so long. Do you know you have not been over for nearly a week?"

A little furrow of a frown twisted itself between her eyes.

"I was watchin' you makin' a fool of yourself with that big lynx, down by the lake," she said, ignoring the question. "Some day that old girl, as you call her, is goin' to rip your insides out."

"Willow," he said quickly, "you must n't talk like that. It 's not ladylike. Besides, Lulu would n't hurt me. She likes me, you see."

"But that won't keep her from clawin' you if she so takes a notion," said the girl moodily. "A lynx is a lynx, an' it ain't nothin' else. Some day she 'll get you off your guard, an' then —" She clicked her white even teeth together and the frown deepened.

"You ain't got no sense, anyway, Dorkin. You trust everything too much. Dad says that any one

who trusts anythin' at all is a fool, an' any one who trusts *everythin'* — is a *damn* fool."

"Willow," he said gently, "you must n't swear. You promised me you would n't do it again. I know you don't realize how awful it sounds to hear an oath coming from your lips, but you'll have to take my word for it. You and I are good pals, girlie. We've been together a lot, and we think a whole heap of each other, don't we?"

He lifted her head so that her eyes met his and she smiled a quivering little smile and looked down again.

"What is it?" he asked concernedly. "You don't seem your old self to-day. Is there anything wrong, Willow? Tell me."

For a long moment she was silent; then she lifted her eyes again.

"Dad — he got shot up, last night, an' I guess he's bound to die," she said quiveringly; "I thought as you might come over an' see him."

"Good God!" cried Dorkin. "Why did n't you let me know sooner, Willow? My poor little girl, of course I'll go. Come, we'll take the canoe and go across by way of Lesser Lake; it's the shorter and quicker way."

"No, I reckon we'd best take the trail," said the girl. "Abe Dalton and his gang are down somewheres along Lesser Lake, an' you know what they'd do to you if they caught you out there."

"But —" said the woodsman gravely, "I'm not

afraid of them, an' your father may need help very much."

"I know you ain't scared," cried the girl; "I know you're strong enough to tie that bunch together an' throw 'em into the lake, but it ain't their way to show themselves — damn 'em!"

The woodsman stood for a moment, thinking deeply. "Perhaps, after all, you're right, Willow," he decided. "Come along up to the cabin and I'll tell Pete what I want done here, then we'll strike the trail to Cove Haunt."

They passed side by side up the walk, through the grove of hardwoods and over to a long, low building that stood a little apart from the cabins.

A man was down on his hands and knees before a large coop of slabs, tacking willow strips across its face so as to form a close screen. He rose at Dorkin's call and came towards them. He was short and slight, with regular, swarthy features and straight black hair that reached to his shoulders.

He showed a perfect set of teeth in a smile as his black eyes fell upon the girl, but he did not speak. His glance travelled to the face of the woodsman.

"Pete," spoke his master, "I am going over to Cove Haunt and will likely not return before night. Daddy Farney has met with an accident and needs me. I wish you would see that all the birds and animals are cooped and kennelled right away; a storm is in the air and we can look for a bad one just at

this time of year. Have you seen Lulu?" he asked anxiously.

"Yes. He pass me not many minute ago," answered the Frenchman. "Dat ole cat he mad, I guess. He swear at me good an' plenty lak he tink I was to blame. I guess his kitten should be wean, else he goin' to get pretty cross, dat cat."

"I think you are right, Pete," agreed the woodsman. "We'll take the kittens from her to-morrow — at least I'll take them from her," smiling as he noted the look of alarm on his helper's face, — "and you might knock together some kennels for them after you have everything snugly housed."

He passed into the cabin for his medicine chest, and the girl took a step or two nearer the Frenchman and spoke in guarded tones.

"I heard my dad say, LaPeer, that you could shoot holes through the leaves as they fell from the trees. Is that right?"

The Frenchman smiled and the flush on his dark skin deepened. "Your fadder has much too high opinion of my shoot," he said modestly.

"Abe Dalton, he says you are the very devil with a rifle," frowned the girl. "Tell me," she insisted, taking another step forward, "*can* you shoot? — shoot *well*, I mean; I want to know."

"Well," answered LaPeer with a shrug, "you ask me one question straight out and I answer dat question straight out, me. I do shoot rifle preety

good. Jes how good" — he laughed softly — "dat Abe Dalton, he should know, I guess."

"Listen," she said quickly, as Dorkin stepped from the cabin. "My dad got a bullet through his shoulder last night, an' he's bleedin' inside. I guess maybe it's all up with him. Dalton an' his gang are likely mixed up in it. Dad was in with that bunch, but he's sort of turned against them, of late. They'll get you an' maybe him," nodding towards Dorkin who was advancing, "if they kin. There ain't nothin' goin' to happen yet; but if Dad dies —"

"Tanks, Willow-de-Wisp," bowed the helper. "We will be on guard. I'm ver' sorry for your fadder. I lak dat man ver' mooche. Sacré," he muttered beneath his breath. "I know dat White Hawk or Dalton get heem some day sure."

"I'll be back to-night, Pete," called Dorkin as he and the girl turned towards the trail.

LaPeer stood watching them until they vanished among the waving firs; then he strode over to his cabin. He emerged quickly with a short, heavy rifle, and came back slowly to the outer building, snuggling the gun against his cheek and crooning to it as he would to a child.

"Look you," he whispered, "let me tell you one ting, leetle gun. Some tam, maybe soon, you shoot preety queek an' preety straight lak you always do for Pete, eh?"

A darting shadow streaked the sward in front of him and, glancing quickly up, his eyes marked a

foraging hawk vanishing among the trees eighty yards to the right. With a single movement and almost in a second's time the rifle was thrown forward and lowered, but not before it gave the quick bark that had spelt death to many a marauder of the stockade.

A handful of brown feathers drifted away on the wind, and a crumpled brown body came hurtling to earth.

LaPeer smiled and patted the brown stock of the rifle. "Maybe" — he chuckled — "maybe I shoot *dam*' well. I dunno."

## CHAPTER II

DADDY FARNEY was dying. He lay stretched on a cot of furs, his glazing eyes fastened to the tiny window covered with oiled mooseskin as though his last look would be on the sunlight he had always loved with a natural-born woodsman's devotion. The peaceful expression very often seen on the faces of those who die from gunshot wounds cloaked the rugged hardness of the face of the man who had been a trapper for fifty years, and more or less a defier and violator of the law ever since he had been able to set a trap.

In the rack of deer-prongs close above his head rested his rifles, a long muzzle-loading one and a shorter repeater of modern design.

From the smoky ceiling, attached to pegs driven into the log scantlings, hung haunches of dried venison and sides of pork. Although the month was May and the air outside balmy, in the crude fireplace a hickory log was blazing: its ruddy tongues sending forth reflections that seemed to spit vindictively at the subdued glow of sunlight straining through the parchment.

Seated on the foot of the cot, his chin in his hands, was a boy of perhaps nineteen summers. His face was swarthy and thin, not unlike that other face

turned towards the window; his black eyes were sombre.

He stood up, as the form on the cot stirred with a groan, and lifted a dipper of water from the bench.

"Thirsty, Dad?" he asked commiseratingly.

"Burnin' up, Dannie, jest burnin' up," whispered the wounded man feebly. "I guess I'll be passin' through mighty quick, now."

"Oh, Dad!" cried the boy, clenching and unclenching his hands in an agony of feeling. "You must n't give up; you must n't, do ye hear? You're goin' to get all right again. The bleedin's stopped an' the fever's 'bout gone. Willer'll be back here with Dorkin soon. He'll know what to do."

"They'll have to get here pretty quick, I'm thinkin', son," wheezed the father.

"Dad," cried the boy, "who did it, d' ye think?"

A faint smile flittered across the greying face.

"That's hard to say, son," he answered. He gave a long sigh and lay still, breathing in short, weak gasps. "What you 'spose is keepin' 'em, son?" he whispered. "I gotta see Dorkin afore I cross over; I jest gotta see him, that's all."

The boy went to the door and threw it open. A breath of fragrant, wood-scented air entered and brushed the drawn, clammy face of the dying man.

"Adder-tongues," he whispered, a smile flickering across his lips, "adder-tongues an' vi'lets — the blue birds will be twitterin' an' buildin'— the partridge will be strummin' on the ridges, rushes

pokin' their green noses from th' shallers. Gawd, oh, Gawd, how I hate to leave it all!"

The boy heard and gave a shuddering, voiceless sob. His eyes sought the wide forest. "They're comin' up the trail now, Dad," he cried. "They'll be here right soon."

"Will they, son?" returned the father eagerly. "Well, then, you go down an' meet 'em an' hold Willer outside thar with you awhile. I gotta see Dorkin alone."

"All right, Dad; another drink afore I go?"

"No, nuthin' nuthin', 't all. I've got the taste of new leaves an' wood-blossoms in my mouth, Dannie. Maybe it'll last till I go. It's a heap better'n water. You slip along an' send Dorkin in here."

He lay, with eyes closed, as the woodsman entered. The sunlight had slipped away from the glazed window; the fire had died to a smouldering heap. Outside a freshening breeze stirred the fir woods, as low in the heavens spread a widening canopy of cloud. Dorkin knelt beside the couch and lifted one of the old man's hands.

"Daddy Farney," he said sympathetically, "this is hard luck."

"It's comin' on to storm, ain't it, Dorkin?" asked the trapper, opening his eyes. "I fancy I hear them old trees a-grievin'."

"Yes, Daddy, it's going to storm."

"Wall, that's all right. I allers reckoned I'd like to pass out when this wild world I know so well was

cryin'. It's better than havin' to trek across when the sun was on the leaves an' the birds were singin'."

Dorkin was silent.

"Let me have a look at the wound, Daddy," he said at length; "maybe I can do something."

"Look all ye like, but you can't do nuthin'," whispered the trapper.

Dorkin gently unwrapped the clumsy bandage from about the wound, which lay low down behind the shoulder. The heavy, soft-nosed bullet had gone clean through, leaving a gaping hole. One glance was sufficient for him to realize that there was no earthly help for the grizzled trapper. Gently he replaced the bandage, and sat looking down at the ashing face before him.

The trapper opened his eyes, and fastened them upon Dorkin's face. "I want ter speak to you 'bout Willer," he said. "I know you're a square man, an' when I go I want you to look arter her. Will ye do it?"

He asked the question with a directness that had always been a strong characteristic of him.

"Surely," answered Dorkin quickly, "if you wish it, Daddy."

"Wall, I do wish it. I wish it more 'n anything else in the world, Dorkin. Go over thar and lift up that bearskin in the corner. You'll find a trapdoor an' under that door you'll find a box. Jast bring it here."

Farney sank back, utterly exhausted, and when

Dorkin returned from executing the order, his mind was wandering. But upon the pressure of the woodsman's cool hand on the hot forehead, the dying man drifted partly back into the present.

"You got it?" he whispered.

"Yes, Daddy, I have it."

"It's hern," said the trapper; "it's Willer's. I aimed to tell her about it soon. Now you'll have to tell her. That box holds what will prove the truth of what I'm goin' ter tell you now. An' thar's some trinkets in that wuth a lot o' money, Dorkin. But I must tell ye—"

He paused through sheer weakness, and for a long time lay looking up at the woodsman. "Dorkin," he said finally. "I've been a right bad man in my day, one way an' another— I've stole from the traps of other trappers, played hell with the rangers, fooled the Government, done lots of things I ain't proud of; you know all that?"

Dorkin was silent.

"But maybe what you don't know is that I stole from trappers who'd pilfered my traps afore I tetched theirn; fooled the rangers 'cause they tried to do me dirt, an' the Government 'cause it tried to treat me unfair. I ain't proud of doin' all these things, but I can't say I'm sorry either — it's all a matter of justice as I see it. One thing I never did do an' that is back-trail on a friend. Abe Dalton, he wanted me to do it; wanted me to help him raid your Hardwoods Retreat. I'm tellin' you this so that

you'll watch out fer him an' his gang; not to boast that I was loyal to the man who's allers played straight by me."

He paused, panting, and by and by weakly resumed: "There's one thing I gotta tell you, afore I strike the trail of the Big Unknown. Leetle Willer — she ain't"— a paroxysm of coughing interrupted him, and when it passed, his mind was wandering again. He half raised himself on his elbow and let his burning eyes drop to the dipper. Dorkin lifted the water to his lips, and he sank back on the furs with a long sigh.

"Let me see, what was I sayin'?" he continued faintly. "Oh, yes, I was tellin' you about my early trappin' days, up on the North Daskatooch. I'd built a nice snug little cabin 'twixt the forks of the Grand. My woman helped me build it. First year up there our boy, Dannie, was born. It was mighty hard goin' in them days. Sixty miles of a trek to the nearest Hudson Bay post an' mighty small money for prime skins at that. But we got along; we got along." He lay breathing heavily and by and by continued: "Eight year we stayed up there in the forks. Dannie were just a year and a half old, I remember, when one day, spring it was, another little baby boy was born."

A flickering smile played across the drawn face and the hands on the fur opened and closed. "I remember jest how I felt. I'd allers wanted a leetle gal, an' when I learned that it was a leetle boy in-

stead, I jest had to walk out inter the spicy night, I was that disappointed. An old Algonquin squaw, named Darwana, who'd helped bring Dannie inter the world, was with my woman, an' I knowed it was all right to leave 'em thar alone. So I walked the trail all night.

"The dew mists were risin' off the trees when I got back to the cabin. The squaw met me at the door. She said somethin' in Algonquin, as she brushed past me, but I did n't understand. I went in where my woman was. She was sleepin' quiet, with little Dannie sleepin' beside her. The newborn baby was sleepin' too with its tiny face up against the mother's breast."

The sick man's voice halted and Dorkin diluted some whiskey with water and held it to his lips. Again the faint smile illumined the sunken features, and the weakening voice went on:—

"Then I got down on my knees an' prayed, Dorkin. 'O Gawd,' I prayed, 'I know I 'm not fit to pray, but, Gawd, I want you to know that I 'm obliged to you fer this child, an' though I wanted a little girl baby, I ain't holdin' nuthin' ag'in' You.' I kept on prayin' an' prayin' that prayer. I felt that there was only one thing to do an' that was to pray. My wife was still sleepin' when old Darwana slipped into the room. It was night an' the moon streamed in through the winder. She'd lit the rush lamp, an' I went over to the bed an' looked down— an', so help me Gawd, if my woman did n't open her eyes

an' say—'It's a little gal, Daddy. Ain't you right glad?'

"Glad! I jest slipped down on my knees an' prayed again. 'Much obliged, O Gawd,' sez I, an' then I broke right down and cried."

The old trapper's voice had sunk to a whisper; his breath came in little panting gasps.

A cough shook his lank frame, and Dorkin wiped a fleck of blood from the white lips with a damp cloth.

"Better rest awhile, Daddy," he advised. "Try and sleep, and you can tell me the rest of the story when you wake up."

"Is that the wind I hear?" whispered the trapper.

"Yes."

"An' it's gettin' close an' dark outside, ain't it?"

"It will be raining soon," said the woodsman.

"I'll likely pass out with the storm," panted the man. "I want to go out when the wind is whippin' the trees an' Old Lake Baittibi grits her white teeth, so I'd best finish. There's somethin' I've got t' tell ye, Dorkin.

"We named the baby Willer, 'cause she was so slender and supple jest like a red willer shoot, and the trappers they all called her the Wisp, 'cause she was allers appearin' an' disappearin' at unexpected times. When she was six my woman took swamp fever an' died. Arter that, more 'n ever, th' gal was jest about life t' me. She was allers jest somethin' I'd prayed fer an' got, an' I've prayed my

thanks fer her regular every night o' my life since that day, my thanks t' Gawd fer sendin' her. I've cheated an' stole an' swore an' drank, I have, but allers at night I prayed my little prayer o' thanks, an' what I've got t' tell you now is that she —"

His weak voice died in a moan. He lay, scarcely breathing, and the man watching thought that all was over; but by and by the heavy eyes opened —

"It's gettin' darker, ain't it?" whispered the old man. "Dorkin —, you'll take keer o' — my gal baby?"

Dorkin pressed the chilling hands in answer. Dannie and Willow stole silently into the room and stood close beside the cot, but the trapper's filming eyes looked beyond them. For long, slow hours he lay so, scarcely breathing. It was late afternoon when his filming eyes sought those of the watchers about his cot.

"The storm has broke," he whispered; "the firs are bendin' an' creakin' — Carry me over to the darkest corner of the cabin an' lay me down there."

Dorkin lifted him gently up and bore him to the far corner of the room.

"Ah," he breathed. "We all wanter crawl away inter the dark sometime — sometime — Rip off that skin from the winder — I wanter have the rain splash in on my face — It's growin' stormier. I kin hear the waves on the beach — I have n't told ye that she — Much obleeged, Gawd —"

Dorkin laid the hand he held softly down and reached through the gloam for the boy and girl.

"He has gone across," he said gently. Then with a convulsive sweep of his strong arms he gathered the bereaved woods-children to him.

## CHAPTER III

As they stood thus in the presence of death, the winds swept to a low whisper and the downpour of rain ceased. Gradually the sable cloak of the storm lifted; a gleam of sunlight peered through a fissure of tattered, purple-lipped cloud. Then in the skies above Old Creation Hills a vari-hued rainbow grew up and hung suspended above a rain-cleansed, scented world.

Looking down on the face of the dead man Dorkin's mind recalled a verse of an old poem he had once read and remembered, as one will remember that which one but vaguely understands; a poem entitled the "Seagull," which an old classmate of his had written: —

> "And I'll skim the brine with these wings of mine
> And scorn the sheltered shore,
> Till I grip the mane on the hurricane,
> And flit to the Nevermore.
> For my restless soul, like the waves that roll,
> Knows neither home nor rest —
> When the tempest sings, let me fold these wings,
> And sleep on the wild sea's breast."

He stooped and folded the dead man's hands on his bosom. Then he glanced at the boy and girl. They stood side by side, Willow's right hand gripping Dannie's left. In her big eyes was the look of a

hurt wild thing. She trembled when Dorkin put his hand sympathetically upon her shoulder, and her arm went about her brother's neck. But she did not speak. Like the lad, who stood gazing upon the motionless form on the skins with hot eyes from which the tears fell fast, she was voiceless. Gently Dorkin drew the young people outside where a blanket of golden sunlight lay upon dripping grass and fern. "Look," he said, pointing to the barred skies between the rainbow and Old Creation, "Daddy passed through yonder."

Dannie caught his breath as he gazed and his face lit up with a wistful smile. "If we only knew fer sure that Dad went through there," he said, "we'd be right glad."

"If Dorkin says he went through," said the girl, "why, o' course he did." She reached for the big man's hand and carried it to her face. She rested her white cheek against it, and her bosom heaved as she gazed upon the glorious lights beneath the dimming rainbow.

"Dannie," spoke Dorkin gently, "you remember, it was Daddy's wish that his last sleep should be beneath the big oak where the trail divides. It will be as he wished, laddie, but we must hurry."

The boy turned with a sigh. "Yes," he faltered, "Dad allers liked that old tree. We'll make his grave thar. We'd most like to have it all over afore the birds quit singin', would n't we, Willer?"

The girl nodded. "An' when it's all hushed, I'd most like to play him the tune he loved best on the fiddle," she said chokingly.

She turned towards the cabin, but Dorkin restrained her. "I'll fetch the fiddle, Willow," he said; "you stay out here in the sunlight."

She smiled bravely up into his face. "Whatever you want me to do, I'll do," she said simply.

He left her standing wrapped in the view above Old Creation, and passed into the cabin.

As he looked down at the peaceful face on the skins, he remembered what Daddy Farney had striven to tell him about the tin box. He had forgotten all about the box. He turned to the cot where he had left it. *It was gone.* A long incision had been cut in the oiled skin of the window close to the cot. Somebody had stolen the box and with it the secret which the old trapper had vainly tried to tell him.

For a moment Dorkin stood in stupefied amazement at what had happened, then his mind became active again. What could that box contain? he wondered; something of importance surely, judging from the effort the dead man had made towards its preservation; and now he, Dorkin, had been the unwitting agent of its loss. He stood still in the centre of the room, vexed with himself for his carelessness, disgusted with the vandal who had no respect even for death. He reached for the violin hanging on the wall and went out where Willow still stood gazing at the changing colors above the far hills.

"Dorkin," she asked, as she took the violin from his hand and snuggled it against her face, "do you suppose there's woods an' lakes an' rivers on t' other side of them gold bars, 'cross there?"

"I believe there's whatever Daddy most loved beyond those golden bars, Willow," he answered.

She sighed and the first tears her eyes had known since her bereavement stole down her cheeks.

"Then it's all right," she murmured. "If there was n't birds an' trees an' marshes an' sech like, across there, it 'd be *hell* fer Daddy."

"Suppose you go up on the knoll and join Dannie," Dorkin suggested. "I will carry Daddy over, and together we'll lay him away to rest under the big oak."

"Oh, yes," she said, — and the heartache in her voice hurt him, — "we'll lay him where he wanted to be laid. And then, Dorkin?"

She turned towards him, her face uplifted, her eyes humid with a light he could not understand.

"Then we will all go up to the Preserve, Willow; you and Dannie are going to live with us, now."

"Us?"

"Yes. Dannie with me in my cabin, you with LaPeer and his wife in the one close beside it. Are you glad?" smiling at the look of wonder on her face.

"Yes," she said softly, "right glad."

Into her wan cheeks the red blood stole and mounted until the warmth of it kindled a fire in her eyes. He watched her, his heart beating a little

quicker, then turned and walked slowly up the path to the knoll.

When he turned to reënter the cabin a tall Indian stepped out from the trees and stood before him.

"How," said the newcomer gravely.

"How, Sagawa," returned Dorkin, holding out his hand.

The Indian took it, his piercing black eyes on Dorkin's, his strong face showing no emotion, as he said: "You are the friend of Sagawa and to you he will speak, openly. When the spring wind calls, Wa-wa flies northward to the forest lakes. When the white wolf lopes on the upland, Sagawa hears the voice of a brother in distress. He has come to find the hands that fed him when he was hungry, and plucked him from the cataract when the freshet swooped down, folded forever. Sagawa would know how his friend, the aged trapper, came to his death. Will his brother who says 'come' to the wild things and they follow, tell him?"

He folded his arms across his broad breast and stood waiting.

"He was shot in the back, Sagawa," said Dorkin sadly. "It happened somewhere down near the Black River that runs between the poplars. He crawled to his cabin on his hands and knees. He did not know who shot him."

The Indian lifted his head with a superb gesture. "Look," he cried, holding up his right hand, fingers distended. "Twice as many fingers as you see here

are not as many as the years I have known him. He fed me, saved my life in the time of deep snows, when the current carried me down, and an Algonquin never forgets. Three nights ago the white wolf crossed my trail, and when the moon rose above the lake, I saw him. His long nose was pointed towards the golden track that threads the tamaracks."

"You mean the hardwoods, Sagawa?"

"Yes, the hardwoods," said the Indian. "As I watched him, he lifted his muzzle to the skies and gave the death howl."

He paused and glanced towards the cabin. "Then," he resumed, "I stamped out my camp-fire and took the trail. One night and two days I trekked the forest; then the white wolf flashed before me once again; and all that night I walked the trail and swam the lakes. Now I am here and I find my white brother gone forever from the hunting field. No more his feet will follow the trails of the forest. The heart of Sagawa is hot with grief and the red mists rise to choke the trails that wind through valley and upland. He must hunt for the slayer of his friend and brother."

Dorkin pointed to the weaving lights above the far hills. "Look, Sagawa," he said: "your friend and brother has ridden on the wild storm horses through the golden bars which Gitche Manito let down in the skies, yonder. Beyond lies a bigger, brighter, happier hunting ground. He would have you join him there some day. Let there be no stain of blood

on the hand he will hold, Sagawa. Fight off the red mists that choke the trails, quench the fires that cry vengeance in your heart. Come with me."

He led the Indian across to the cabin. The late afternoon sunlight was streaming through the uncovered window, caressing softly the lined, peaceful face of the old trapper who lay asleep.

For a long time the Algonquin stood looking down at that face, his own face showing nothing of the conflict in his hot heart. Then he spoke: —

"The fires of the forest blacken and char what they destroy; but the souls of the trees that vanish linger always in the scented aisles of the forest. The frost that chills the flowers to their long sleep lines their lips with a smile of peace. The Great Spirit has brushed His hand across the face of my brother and left it peaceful like a wood-locked valley after the rain and storm have gone. It is well. Sagawa takes the cold hand that fed him, that saved him from the current, in his." He lifted one of the dead man's hands and held it in his own. His face was turned to the light. In it Dorkin marked sorrow, nobility, purpose.

"Sagawa goes soon," said the regal Algonquin, "to track down the slayer of his friend and brother. After the tempest comes the summer sunlight and the songs of wild birds. After Sagawa has found and slain the slayer of his brother, the red mists will lift from the trails. His white friend, Dorkin, who leads the wild things by his strange power, can never un-

derstand the heart of the Algonquin. Sagawa could not take the hand of his aged brother, in that hunting ground beyond the golden bars, if he left his task undone."

He folded the dead man's hands once more on his breast, and turned to Dorkin.

"My friend of the Hardwoods knows that the hand of the white man's law longs to grip Sagawa; that like the mink of the stream, the fisher of the lake, and the fox of the timberland, he must skulk and hide because he is a hunted thing, because he is supposed to have broken the laws of the white man; it is well. Sagawa will some day prove his innocence. Now he will speak with a true tongue to his white friend and warn him of a danger.

"It is that the lawless trappers of the lowlands, like a pack of wolves, have their noses pointed towards the yellow timberland belonging to Sagawa's friend. When the summer moon has died and the otter, who best loves the darkness, fishes in the stream, they may steal forth and break into the Hardwoods. Sagawa, who knows this, has spoken."

Dorkin held out his hand to the Indian. "Sagawa's brother has heard, and is grateful," he said. "He will guard well what is his, but his heart is heavy because his brother must follow the red trail. Again he would ask him if this must be."

The Indian drew his tall figure erect. "The spirit of Sagawa's aged brother calls to him to avenge his

death," he returned gravely. "Sagawa must follow the red trail. It is well."

He bent and wrapped the big deerskin about the body of the dead trapper. Dorkin watched him, and then suddenly his mind reverted to the box which had been stolen. He opened his lips to speak. Then he shook his head, as though reconsidering. Surely the Indian's heart was hot enough already. He came forward at the motion of the Indian, and together they carried the dead man out into the waning daylight.

Dannie had marked out the grave beneath the big oak. Willow sat on a log, her elbows on her knees, her face in her hands. All about, in tree-tops and shrub, the voices of the wild choristers trilled and warbled in an ecstasy of life and freedom. Far out above the shaggy tree-tops the crimson streamers of dying day gleamed, and drew back, and wove a tapestry of splendor above the hills. The rainbow had melted behind the gold in the west. The angels had put up the bars behind Old Creation.

By the time the grave was ready, the dead man committed to it with a few words by Dorkin, and the sweet-smelling earth filled in, the lights in the west had died to a long splash of mauve-lined drab and gold. Then swiftly this light went out and with it the wild chorus of the birds. Upon the forest rested the spirit of the Great Silence.

Suddenly upon the stillness the voice of a violin stole like the voice of a zephyr that has been

imprisoned in a pocket of the forest and strays through the shadowed aisles when all the twilight winds have folded their wings.

Softly the strains rose until the whole wild world seemed to wake to the song which the violin was singing. Then the music died away, and the world grew very still again. By and by the shadows deepened, and low above the forest the big stars came out faintly, glowing deeper as the shadows deepened, until with the fulness of the night they swam and sang close down above the tree-tops.

From a near-by copse a whip-poor-will whistled and night life awoke in the deep forest. A fox barked from a far upland and was answered by his mate from another upland. From the marshlands of Dagwoo Valley, the frogs voiced their gladness. An owl hooted from the hardwoods; from the lake marshes came the soft quacks of feeding ducks.

And through the scented dusk Dorkin led the boy and girl home with him to the Retreat in the Hardwoods.

## CHAPTER IV

If you were an eagle and were to soar high over the wood-crowned Highlands of Northern Ontario, you would see swimming beneath you millions of acres of forest, dotted with hundreds of deep, clear lakes. And as you ascended so as to look down from a great altitude, this wilderness would take on the form of a giant face with two great lakes for eyes, a white, curving river the grinning mouth, while, protruding aggressively, you would mark the massive chin, shorn clear of its heavy timber by the tools of lumbermen and a second growth of coniferous trees stubbling it like a wiry beard. This would be Old Creation Hills. In the cleft of that chin you would observe a few tiny, white lumps, resting like a flock of sheep after the morning's feeding, and as your eye followed the bare, rocky strip of land that forms the giant's throat, you might see something creeping like a tiny caterpillar from forest to forest. This would be the train ringing along the glimmering steel of the new railroad; those white dots in the cleft of the rugged chin are the unpainted houses of Lookup Settlement.

Towards Lookup Settlement, at the close of a May day, drove a man in a home-made contrivance, honored by the name of "democrat." He was tall

and gaunt, with an old cap that set jauntily on his carroty-colored hair, and blue eyes that twinkled beneath their bushy brows. A reddish goatee stood out on his chin like the quills on a disturbed porcupine. He drove a span of aged, sorrel horses that stumbled along with heads low down, as though they dozed as they walked. He sat with one long arm stretched along the back of his seat, and with face turned partly towards the other occupants of the vehicle, an elderly man and a girl, just arrived from the city.

"We're nigh home now," he informed them, twisting about to grin pleasantly at his passengers.

The girl laughed a silvery little laugh, and threw back the wraps from her throat. "I'm awfully hungry, Mr. Washburn. Are n't you, uncle?" she inquired, turning to the white-haired man beside her.

"Me hungry?" that gentleman responded. "God bless you, Edna, no. I never expect to be hungry again. I can't eat anything. I have n't eaten anything worth while for years, as you well know." And he frowned at the grinning driver, who muttered: —

"Gracious alive! Is that very so?"

"Uncle's health has been precarious for a long time," explained the girl. "We're up here to woo it back for him; think we can do it, Mr. Washburn?"

Her laughing face grew grave as she put the question, and the pathos resting deep in her violet eyes must have found an echoing chord in the old native's

breast, for he answered heartily, "Oh, hell, yes" — and then quickly and apologetically — "You see, Miss, we cure 'em all up here in these Highlands."

Something like a smile fluttered across the delicate face of the man in the back seat; then a little pucker of a frown gathered between his brows. Noting it the girl's face grew grave.

The driver was leaning forward towards the old sorrels now, elbows on his knees. He missed, by a hair's breadth, a rough boulder lying along the track, puckered up his lips, and plunked a stream of tobacco juice fair on its slate face, sighed as though he had executed a difficult task satisfactorily, and, twisting about again, remarked: —

"If you don't get hungry up here, you ain't never goin' to get hungry. That's all."

"I scarcely expect to," said the man from the city peevishly. "I have n't eaten a square meal or slept a good sleep for over a year. Ugh!" he shivered. "This silence up here is awful; it gets on one's nerves." He sank lower in his seat and the girl put an arm about his drooping shoulders.

"The doctor said this forest country would fix you up good as new, Uncle," she comforted. "You must give it a fair chance. You must try and forget that your nerves are frayed, and not think of business at all. I'm going to see that you get real hungry, and I know you will sleep like a baby up here in this clear balsam-filled air, won't he, Mr. Washburn?"

The settler lifted his coonskin cap and scratched

his red mop reflectively. "This here country is the darndest all-round country fer permotin' the eatin' an' sleepin' habit you ever saw," he exclaimed. "I've got a boy named Tommie; he's a ranger now up in Temagami Preserve, an' he finds it hard to do anythin' much else, an' even my Missus, who's a tarter to work when she's real woke up, is that tarnation hard to get awake mornin's that I'd ruther get up an' light the fire myself than try t' tussel with her. Yes, siree," he chuckled, lashing his whip harmlessly above the hollow backs of his drowsy horses, "you can sleep all right up here. Why, dang it all, the Ozone's that there thick that you have to chew it fine afore you kin breathe it. Fact."

He clucked to the sorrels and cracked his whip at an impudent chipmunk who had climbed a stump close by the roadside to investigate the clatter made by the loose spokes of the ancient democrat.

"Take them hosses, now," he shouted; "they go to sleep soon as they be hitched, an' they stay asleep all day, rot 'em! It's mighty unsatisfactory that, 'cause they don't seem to realize that keepin' awake durin' business is the duty of beast as well as man. They're both of 'em disappointin', but of the pair I guess old Moll — she's the off un — is the disappointenest."

"In what respect, Mr. Washburn?" laughed the girl.

"Why, lots o' ways, but jest fer instance, this way. T'other day I had a good chance to swap her

fer a three-year-old geldin' belongin' to Jake Stoker of Cedar Mills. Wall, we'd jest about made the swap when ole Moll dropped off to sleep an' snored like a house afire. Jake, he declared as she had the roarers an' backed outen the deal. Humph, talk about not bein' able to sleep! Everythin' sleeps too tarnation much up here. That's the only thing wrong with this place!"

They rounded a little curve in the road and the laugh on the girl's lips died as her eyes caught the glorious vista spread before her. Low down over the distant tamaracks that edged a broad lake the sun lay like a great ball of fire. Just beneath it lay the forest, clad in new spring garb, sweeping, undulating, deepening from grass-green to moss-green and melting to slate-drab as it climbed the stairlike hills of Old Creation, miles distant. Close in, along the shore, the firs and tamaracks lifted jasper-tipped heads towards a sky of swimming blue, and upon the face of the lake rested a medley of riotous colors such as the girl from the city had never before seen.

Her uncle, too, had caught the spirit of the place. To him also that Northern sunset was a revelation. About it was a grandeur, a beauty as fathomless as it was glorious. Together they gazed westward. Far away swept the sparsely timbered upland rising fold upon fold until it melted into well-nigh impenetrable forest-reserve miles distant, like a wisp of grey smoke in a sombre gold-lined cloud; for the sunset-lights were spraying the tree-tops of the great forest.

For the girl at least, the fatigues of a long railway journey and the bumpy drive from the distant station over rocky, uneven road were forgotten, as she drank in this glorious panorama. Its glory held her enthralled. Her artist's soul rejoiced, and her fingers ached to dig brushes and colors from the big trunk strapped behind her, so that she might paint it all. But the desire passed quickly as she felt a shudder run through the frame of the man beside her, and heard his quick sigh of weariness.

"You are very tired, are n't you, Uncle, dear?" she whispered.

"A little, Edna, a little," he replied; then with a laugh, "do you know, girlie, I believe I am actually getting hungry?"

At his words the lank form on the front seat straightened up, and Washburn faced about, his blue eyes twinkling.

"My ole woman she says to me as I was hitchin' Moll and Bess here to the democrat, says she, 'Pa Washburn, you get them people hum here come seven, 'cause I 'm goin' to have a meal ready what is a meal. I 'm goin' to have ham an' eggs an' pancakes an' maple syrup,' says she.

"An' says I, 'Gosh all hemlock! Ma, what's the use o' gettin' up a lumber-jack's lay-out fer them people?' says I. 'Nobody ever comes up this early in the season but sick folks,' says I. 'What you best do is get some toast an' hot milk an' weak tea ready fer 'em,' says I."

He took off his cap and waved it in the air, with a resounding whoop that awoke echoes far and wide. His infectious merriment caught his listeners. They laughed with him.

"Say," grinned the settler, after the paroxysm had passed. "She is sure a wonder, that ole woman of mine. Ain't her like anywhere in these Northern parts. What you s'pose she said to me, standin' right there with her feet planted an' her two hundred pounds of prime womanhood bubblin' right over with indignation. Says she, 'Pa Washburn, if you don't think anything of your *own* reputation, it's no reason I should n't think somethin' of *mine*. Nobody kin ever say, truthfully, that I ever fed my boarders slops,' says she, 'an' I ain't goin' to do it now neither. Jest fer what you've said, I'm goin' to have Bill, the timber-scaler, ketch some brook trout, and 't ain't 't all unlikely that I'll cream a Shanghai chicken to boot!' says she; 'anyways, you kin depend on it, my reputation as the best cook in Lookup is goin' to be *sustained*.'"

Mr. Washburn took his quid of black-jack from his mouth and shied it at the drooping ears of old Moll. It stuck midway between, where it hung like a tenacious horse-fly. With a dexterous flourish of the whip he dislodged it, and with a chuckle and shake of his carroty mop, resumed: —

"'Course that was what I was workin' fer. I'm a wonderful eater, myself, an' I do love Ma's creamed chicken; so when she lit in on me that there way, I

was so tickled with the manner I'd managed things that I had to get busy bucklin' old Bess's hame-straps together so's Ma would n't see me grinnin'.

"'I doubt like sin if they'll appreciate it, Ma,' says I as I climbed inter the democrat.

"'I can't help it if they don't,' she comes back at me; 'I'm goin' to do my part, an' you be goin' to do yours, which is to get them folks here on the tick of seven,' says she."

Here Mr. Washburn consulted a big, loud-ticking watch, and with a muttered something sat up straight.

Simultaneously the old team woke up and broke into a shambling trot that carried the complaining vehicle around another curve at a merry clip, and there swam into view the settlement of Lookup.

Far back along the road the driver had pointed it out to his visitors from the pinnacle of a high hill, and they had seen it nestling like a bed of white daisies in the heart of a green valley bordered on the one side by a wide lake, on the other by hills veined with white water-courses. Now they saw that what had looked like daisies on a bed of green were really houses built of unpainted lumber; twenty or thirty of them resting on the slope of a big hill. In front lay the deep water, warm in the sapphire glow of a setting sun. Back of the houses climbed the hills tinged with variegated glories of color; green melting to lemon-yellow, slate-grey blending to bronze, while high above, where the timbers thickened, a

hazy sheen of purple and amethyst hung suspended like the lid of a great bowl, a picture of indescribable grandeur upheld by unseen hands.

"That there's Lookup," shouted the driver over his shoulder, above the Gatling-gun reports from the loose spokes in the off hind wheel; for the sleepy sorrels, scenting a good feed of hay and oats not far off, had broken into a stiff canter and were taking the slope like a pair of homing Jack-rabbits.

As he spoke they rounded a slight twist in the white road with a speed that threatened to overturn the decrepit democrat. As they passed the first house of unpainted boards a pair of husky dogs crept out and with uplifted neck-bristles and bared teeth watched them silently.

Farther on, a big St. Bernard bounded across the road straight in front of the sorrels and gave one or two deep barks of welcome, and as they passed the several plain dwellings of Lookup, canines of all kinds and descriptions sprang forth to voice their welcome or protest.

"Sled dogs," explained the driver; "could n't do without 'em up here."

He shook the "lines" and yelled to the team, and with a flourish of their sorrel tails, the aged horses leaped forward like chargers eager for the fray, straight into the heart of a big tamarack grove through which the grey road twisted.

In the cool shadow of this miniature forest the lights were pale and subdued; purple, yellow, and

opal, scintillating so faintly as to be scarcely discernible through the shaggy screen that rested above a flooring of pale-green moss.

Then, as the road curved once more, they dipped into a wide green open, with the big lake sleeping before it and the big forest-crowned hills sweeping beyond it.

In the very heart of this open stood a long, wide, homey cabin of logs, and alongside of this cabin, with a jerk of his elbows and a "Whoa, thar, old gals," Pa Washburn drew up with a flourish.

"This here is our place, an' you're welcome to it an' all it holds," he cried heartily. "S'posin' we light."

Suiting the action to the words, with one bound he sprang free of the rig, and before the girl could think, she found herself lifted in a pair of strong arms and deposited gently upon the spongy sward before the cabin door.

She laughed and shook herself like a spaniel who had been unexpectedly treated to a ducking in the water he was born to love, and turned a flushed face towards her uncle, just in time to see that dignified gentleman being treated in a like manner. As he was placed gently beside her, he turned with a half-amazed, half-injured expression towards her.

"God bless my soul," he muttered, "Edna, dear, it's like living in the prehistoric days. I have n't been lifted in this fashion since I used to play with my brother Bill in the haymow on the old home-

farm. Gad! I wish you would drop a hint to our strong-armed friend there that I can't stand those dip-the-dip stunts. My old rag of a heart is fluttering yet."

Just here there emerged from the cabin a woman of matronly aspect whose plump, bare arms were smeared with flour and whose big, good-natured face fairly beamed with welcome.

"Well, you little dear, you," she cried, planting a motherly kiss on the pink cheeks of the girl. "I know you're 'bout dead tired out, and like as not hungry as a new-weaned calf. Come along in and get some supper; do."

"Ma," introduced Pa Washburn, "this here is Mr. Dayton, who is the young lady's uncle, and Mr. Dayton, sir, this here is my Missus, best woman in Lookup, best cook in Ontario."

"How do, sir," beamed Mrs. Washburn. "Come along in, you and the young lady. I'll bet you're nigh starved to death, and supper's ready and waitin'."

## CHAPTER V

DADDY FARNEY lay asleep in the arms of the only mother he had ever known. His grave rested at the foot of the spreading oak on a tiny eminence which sloped to a swift-running brook. All about him, as he slept, swept the murmuring song of tree and bush and water. Low above the forest the fleecy clouds hung like the petals of a great lily; the winds blew fresh and sweet after the storm. Peace reigned after the war of tempest, and very peacefully reposed the veteran trapper of the Northland, whose spirit had ridden out — as he had hoped it would — on the wild storm horses.

Beside the new grave sat the lad from whom had passed the one being in the world upon whom he had depended.

His elbows were on his knees, his hands nursed his thin face. His sombre eyes looked straight before him into an unfathomable infinity of loneliness.

A soft wind came winnowing up from the valley bearing with it the scent of wild water plants. As it touched his cheek the lad sprang up and with a dry sob stretched his arms above the mound. "Daddy, Daddy," he cried; then sinking on his knees, he murmured, "Daddy, I ain't fergettin'. I'll find out fer sure if he did it — and then —"

Bending lower he let his hot forehead rest against

the cool, sweet earth of the grave; then, rising, he picked up his rifle and turned towards the path to the cabin.

Swiftly he walked until the log home showed through the clearing, then his pace became slower, and to the gaunt hound that met him on the path and raised sad eyes to his, he spoke. "Purp, I can't jes' go in thar, not yit. I can't do it."

The dog whined and wagged his tail, then, turning, trotted back towards the house. The lad followed, haltingly, like one who was weary after a hard trek through an unbroken waste. From the trees all about the cabin the song birds were trilling their lullaby songs to fledglings hidden somewhere away in the sweet-smelling foliage.

Suddenly the boy paused on the path and held up his head in a listening attitude. Then across his grief-drawn face there swept a look that almost glorified it.

Above the piping of the birds had sounded the song of a violin, played by a master-hand. Sweetly the strains came floating to him, as he listened, and, gripping a tall sapling, he stood, head bowed, lips forming voicelessly the words of the refrain: —

"Sweet and low, sweet and low,
Wind of the western sea,
Low, low, breathe and blow,
Wind of the western sea!
Over the rolling waters go,
Come from the dying moon, and blow,
Blow him again to me;
While my little one, while my pretty one sleeps."

It was an old song which Daddy Farney had taught him and the girl; the only one the old man had ever been known to sing. The lad caught his breath quickly. When he looked up there were tears coursing down his cheeks. Slowly he approached the house. Seated beneath a trailing wild-hop vine he found Willow.

She laid the violin across her knees and looked slowly up at him as he approached.

"What 'd you come back fer?" he asked abruptly.

"Fer you," she answered.

"Well, I ain't goin'."

She laid the violin gently down upon a block and came forward to where he stood with head bowed, fingers fumbling the lock of his rifle.

"I ain't comin' fer two reasons," he said as she placed her hands on his shoulders. "Fust is, I've got somethin' important to do 'cross the tamaracks. Second is, I ain't goin' to put Dorkin to no more trouble on my account. He's been right good to us, an' I ain't goin' to make him sorry fer it."

"He says he wants you up there in the Preserve, Dannie."

"That's all right, an' it's mighty like him to say it, but it's no good, Willer; I can't go. You go on back an' say much obliged to him fer me. I'm too damn no-count to do it fer myself. Tell him how I hated to sneak off without thankin' him."

The girl looked at him with big, troubled eyes. To her this hot-hearted lad with whom she had been

reared was more than mere brother; he was pal, companion, a part of herself; and she alone knew and understood him, now that Daddy Farney was gone. The grief and loneliness that were gnawing at his heart were also her grief and loneliness. Her hands tightened on his shoulders and her lips opened as though to speak, but no words came.

If you understand the forest, you have learned that the kindred of the wild are closely bound together. Affection, which in the civilized world is a beautiful thing, in the wilderness is a sublime thing. Unbreakable as the fibre of the poplar, strong and enduring as the tissue of the oak, is the love of one member of the forest family for the other; only, like the interlacing roots of the trees, it lies buried from the gaze of the callous onlooker.

"Willer," spoke the lad, at length, shaking himself erect, "you go on back to the Preserve an' leave me be alone here. If I'm ever goin' ter be a man, I guess maybe the time's come. I'm goin' ter stay here on our grounds — our grounds," he repeated wistfully. "An' I'm goin' to see that they stay ours, too. Set down thar, an' I'll tell you somethin' you don't know." He motioned to a hemlock block and sank on the sod before her. "There's a law up here," he said slowly, his eyes on her face, "a law that says if one trapper leaves his ground fer any reason, either by dyin', breakin' the law, or any other cause, that ground goes to the trapper south of him, if thar 's nobody thar to hold it. It's a dam-

fool Injun law, but it goes, up here. Now Dad's gone, it's up to me to hold out fer our rights, ain't it?"

"I say, ain't it?" he repeated half angrily as the girl made no reply.

She nodded quickly.

"Well, then, you understan' how 't is, Willer. I jest can't leave this cabin, much as I'd like to go up an' sort of help Dorkin on the Preserve. You see, if I was to leave now, Abe Dalton, the trapper south of us, 'ud come, an' then—"

He clicked his strong teeth shut with a snap and springing to his feet tossed the rifle across his arm. "Damn him!" he cried, "I'll get him. Yes, I'll get him jest as sure as I'm alive. I'll even things up with Dalton."

"Do you think—" the girl commenced; then she too stood up, her face whitening and her eyes growing dark with feeling.

"Well, if you ast me, I *do* think it," he answered. "Oh, Gawdamighty, think of it, Willer, think of him layin' out there in the bush waitin' fer pore old Dad to come along so's he could shoot him in the back, think — think —"

He broke off wildly, his slender body swaying with emotion. But the girl stood straight and tall before him and spoke quietly:—

"If he done it, Dannie, if you are *right shore* he done it, why, of course, *you've got to kill him;* but you've got to be right keerful, 'cause he's goin' to kill you fust if he kin."

He turned, with a smile, and half raised his hands as though to draw her to him. "Willer," he said huskily, "you be a right sort of sister. I was half scared to tell ye, but I'm glad you feel that way about it. If Dalton gets me fust, though?" He looked away through the darkening forest and shrugged, — "What, then, Willer?"

"Dannie," she cried, lifting her hands above her head, "if he kills you, if he as much as tries, I'll kill *him*. I swear I'll do it. Oh, you believe me, don't you, Dannie?"

He caught her as she swayed and for a moment he held her against his breast, his drawn face pressed against her hair. Up above their heads an oriole twittered and hung head downward, his crimson breast cutting tiny rainbows against the dark green foliage of the trees.

The girl drew away, and still holding his hand, led him across to the doorway of the cabin.

"You set down, Dannie," she said. "I'm goin' to play you somethin' on the fiddle; jest a little song-tune to cheer you up an' make you ferget; then I'm goin' to get your supper."

He sank down on the doorstep, and seating herself on the block the girl picked up the fiddle. The old dog limped up and stretched himself between them, looking from one to the other with grave, inquiring eyes.

The girl played and as she played the song birds grew silent. Swiftly stretched the evening shadows.

A ray of spun gold, lined with purplish spray, slipped down through the chinks of the trees and touched the face of the bush-lad huddled in the doorway. The girl caught the gleam and smiled tenderly. She saw the blue-veined lids sweep over the weary eyes, and heard the long sigh of surrender as he gave himself up to the sleep he had not known since the dawning of the tragedy which was to stand out upon his life.

And so she played on, and the swift Northern twilight drooped like a cowl, and from the distant lake there came the voices of the diving water-fowl.

The stars were blossoming in the sky when she at length rose and slipped quietly past the sleeper into the cabin. Silently she lit the candle on the rough table, then sinking on her knees before the skin-covered couch she let the full tide of her grief have sway in tears.

After a time she stood up, and moving softly across the room touched a match to the kindling in the grate. Dannie had settled down upon a rush mat just outside the door. She smiled as she heard the regular breathing that assured her that he was sleeping. She reached for the dried venison hanging from the rafter, and sliced some of the meat into a big frying-pan. She filled the kettle with water and slung it in the crane above the leaping fire, then sat down to wait until the kettle boiled, her eyes on Dannie's upturned face.

The light had drawn the whining mosquitoes from

the thickets outside. She tiptoed over and placed a piece of cheese-cloth over the boy's face to protect it from the stinging bites. Then she went out and gathered a handful of twigs. These she placed before the open door and set fire to them, throwing a handful or two of damp chips on the blaze, as it leaped up, to make the dense smoke called by the woods-people a "smudge," and which acts as a barrier to the troublesome swamp-flies.

When at length the tea was steeped and the venison fried to a crisp brown, she called Dannie.

He sat up immediately and rubbed his eyes. "How long was I asleep, Willer?" he asked as he arose.

"Over an hour," she replied; "you ought to feel better, Dannie."

"I guess I needed a wink or two," said the lad; "I ain't been sleepin' much since —"

"Come on to supper," said Willow quickly; "you must be hungry."

"Wall, I be. An' it does seem good to see you settin' thar in your old place ag'in, Willer. All day I've looked across an' found your place empty an' his place empty —"

"I'm not goin' back to Hardwoods Retreat no more," said Willow as she poured the tea; "not unless you'll go too," she added, as he glanced up with troubled eyes.

"You must go, Willer," frowned the boy. "You simply must go. Dad would n't rest quiet if he

knowed you an' me was n't doin' jest what he's laid out we would; no, Willer, you must go back. I'll be all right here now, by myself."

He took his seat at the table and fell to on the appetizing venison with a zest born of long fasting.

Silence fell between them. The firelight danced and painted ruddy pictures on the smoke-blackened rafters; the smoke of the smudge drifted up, in pungent, fragrant puffs. Far off, somewhere, a night-hawk was whistling plaintively, but beyond that all the wood-world was locked in silence.

Willow, her elbows on the table and her chin in her hands, was gazing deep into the shooting flame of the fire. Watching her, the boy became aware for the first time that she had changed; what the change was he could not fathom, but it was there, a transformation so subtle as to baffle even the eyes of love.

Her hazel eyes were alive with a new light that the drooping lids and long lashes failed to conceal; her bosom rose and fell to her deep breathing. Once she smiled, and the red blood stole into cheeks and temples, then faded as a shadow drifted across her face. She lifted her head with a quick sigh, her hands clenching and dropping to her sides as she turned towards the lad who had spoken her name.

She looked straight back into his searching eyes, and a furrow of pain seared her brow as she answered.

"Yes, Dannie?"

The lad pushed back his stool and stood awk-

wardly up. His own face was pale and his lips quivered a little as he said: —

"Do you love Dorkin, Willer?"

She did not answer. She drooped lower over the table and trembled a little.

Dannie moved forward and laid his hand on her thick, waving hair in all tenderness. "Me an' you, we're woods-children, gal," he said softly. "We was n't born to do nuthin' by halves. One thing we allers must do, Willer, an' that is play square with others an' ourselves. I don't know what it is to love, but I do know what it is to hate. It's goin' to be either hell or heaven fer you, gal, one or t' other."

She leaned back and looked up into his face, smiling radiantly.

"It's all right, Dannie," she said quietly; "I reckon when I tell him that I love him, he'll be glad."

The boy knit his brow in a frown. "Do you think that's jest the thing to do, Willer?" he asked perplexedly.

She looked at him wonderingly. "Why not?" she asked simply.

"I don't know. I was thinkin' — but — I guess maybe, arter all, it's best you should tell him. He's damn square, Dorkin is."

"Yes, he's damn square," she repeated gently. "He's good, Dannie, he's strong — he's everything!"

"That's so." The lad sat down on a stool and

gazed thoughtfully into the fire. Silence fell between them.

At length Dannie spoke, hesitatingly.

"Have you ever thort that there might be somebody else?" he asked, — "some other gal, I mean," as her eyes flashed a quick question.

She looked at him dumbly, her face going white. Then she stood up, gripping the rough boards of the table in her strong brown hands.

"No," she whispered, "I never thort of that. But — but there is n't no other gal; there can't be no other gal. There can't, there can't!" She almost shrieked the words and fell back into her seat, arms thrown across the table and head drooped upon them.

He reached out and clasped one of the clenched hands in his own. "There, there," he said soothingly. "O' course there can't. It's mighty foolish to think of sech a thing. Jest ferget what I said, Willer. It's all right. It's bound to be all right."

She lifted a wan face and smiled bravely. "We 're mates, him an' me," she said softly; "up here in the big woods, we're mates, jest as sure as the stars are in the sky. Oh, don't you understand, Dannie? He's mine, mine, all mine; there can't be no other gal! There can't!"

"No, Willer," he consoled, patting her hands; "there jest can't. He orter be right glad."

He stood up and reached for the water-bucket. "I'll go on down to the spring an' get a pail o' fresh water," he said.

The girl rose and commenced clearing the table of the supper dishes.

"There's somethin' I guess maybe I ort to tell you, Willer," said the boy, after he had returned and placed the bucket of water on the bench. "This arternoon, when I was out by Dad's grave, somethin' happened that's got me guessin'. Set down an' I'll tell you what it was.

"You've heerd about that man Savage, who comes down from the Post twice er three times a year to buy pelts from the Dalton gang? You've heerd Dad an' me speak about him; he's crooked an' everybody in these parts knows it, I guess. Well, I've only seen him once er twice, but I'm pretty sure I'd know him ag'in, if I saw him, an' I'm real sure I saw him to-day. I was sittin' out under the big oak, when this feller Savage come up along the trail. He was decked out in city clothes an' when he sees me, he don't let on. I wanted to stop him an' ast him what scheme he an' that Abe Dalton was hatchin' for this comin' season, but I did n't. I jest let him pass. But he's up to some dirty work, all right. What do you think his game is, Willer?"

"I don't know," said the girl slowly. "More trouble comin' likely. Was n't it him an' Injun White Hawk and the Daltons who set fire to the Jacob Company's mills, Dannie?"

"Yes, leastways it was n't proved that they did, but every one knows they did, an' everybody knows that they are jest waitin' fer a chance to do Dorkin

some damage. Dalton's men all hate Dorkin 'cause he's strong enough to twist 'em in two, an' he 'll do it, too, if he ever finds 'em on his grounds, an' this man Savage is snoopin' 'round here fer no good. He's likely shapin' trouble, with Dalton, fer Dorkin. Maybe I best speak to Dorkin 'bout it, Willer?"

"Maybe you'd best," said the girl. "Won't you come over to the Preserve and stay to-night, Dannie?" she asked coaxingly. "I promised Dorkin I'd bring you back with me."

She picked up her hat and violin and smiled entreatingly down at the boy.

"Willer," he said, "you allers have your own way about everythin'. 'Course I intended goin', but I guess what you mean is, will I stay? I tell you what I'll do. I'll stay there nights an' help on the Preserve mornin's. Arternoons I'll stick on our own grounds. How's that?"

The girl looked her gladness. "I'd hoped you'd be willin' to do that, Dannie," she said; "Dorkin'll be pleased."

She blew out the candle and they passed outside where a soft night wind was throwing the soul of wood-flowers abroad through the uplands. A big moon was rising above the tree-tops, and the broad face of far-off Old Creation glowed in a soft radiance.

They stood for a moment, their eyes drinking in the pale glory, in the mind of each the same thought.

"The bars are up to-night, Dannie," said the girl softly.

He did not answer, but the hold on her arm tightened.

Then they turned towards the trail stretching like a white cord through the frowsy upland.

## CHAPTER VI

"As I was sayin'," remarked Pa Washburn, as he passed a generous helping of bacon and potatoes across to his guests from the city, "there ain't no man or woman born who kin keep from gettin' hungry an' sleepy in this here country, no, sir-ee!"

"I must admit that I slept better last night than I have for a long time," agreed Mr. Dayton, attacking the tempting bacon before him with a zest that brought a look of pleased surprise from his niece opposite.

"And you, Miss," beamed the portly hostess, as she poured the coffee, "I do hope you slept well?"

"Perfectly," smiled Miss Marsh.

"Then Pa's snores did n't disturb you none? Gracious alive, how that man does snore; it 's somethin' awful! Me, I don't mind it 'cause my folks kept store at Niagara Falls afore I was married, an' I 'm used to the rumblin', but there are some people who come here summers do object to it. One young man who came up to get clear of hay fever told Pa that he'd jest as soon sleep on the caboose of a freight train, an' have done with it, as have Pa sleepin' underneath him. He said there would be less jar an' rumble to the caboose than there was to Pa's snores. — One er two spoons of sugar in your coffee, Mr. Dayton?"

"Thank you, no coffee for me," returned Mr. Dayton. "A glass of water will suit me fine."

"Will ye have some tea?" asked Pa Washburn, frowning in deep concern. "We have three kinds of tea, black, green, an' mixed. Ma'll make ye a cup quicker 'n a mink kin hide her kittens; all ye got to do is say the word."

Mr. Dayton glanced imploringly at his niece who hastened to explain. "Uncle's doctor made him promise not to drink either tea or coffee, Mr. Washburn. And," she added soberly, "please do not tempt him, because he is really fond of a cup of strong tea."

"Wall, I do declare," sighed the settler. "It do seem too bad he can't have what he likes up here in Gawd's country, does n't it, Ma?"

"No, it does n't neither," snapped his good wife. "It ain't too bad providin' it's goin' to make him well an' strong ag'in, Pa, and I do s'pose the doctor knows best."

She filled a glass full of sparkling water and passed it down the board to the banker. "That's good spring water, sir," she beamed, "an' I do hope you'll enjoy it."

Pa Washburn's blue eyes twinkled. "It *is* good water, that," he nodded. "Smallest microbe to be found in it is brook trout, so you need n't be scared to drink all you want of it."

"Pa," said Mrs. Washburn sternly, "don't make irreverent remarks. Ask the blessin'."

Washburn's eyes at once lost their roguish twinkle and his lean face took on a strained expression as he bowed his head above his plate and repeated the time-worn grace of his fathers and forefathers: "God bless this portion of our food to our use an' us truly to thy service. Amen."

During breakfast the settler enlightened his visitors with an account of the place and its people. They learned that he was time-keeper in the Flaville Lumber Mill, a job that took less than half of his time, and that Tommie, his son, man-grown now, was a fire ranger in the big Temagami Region. Flaville's Mill was one of five in the vicinity and the only one that ran all the year round.

"Of course," said Pa Washburn, "things ain't up to what they used to be afore the Government jumped in and made a Reserve out of the best tract of the timbered Highlands. Afore that happened there was over twenty mills all runnin' full blast, night and day. Now all there is left is jest a few, runnin' falls and winters. It seems most too bad, it does that."

"Pa 's bitter," explained Mrs. Washburn, when at length the man sat silent, brooding above his plate, "but 't ain't his fault at all, 'cause anybody what knows him knows he was n't cut out fer a time-keeper in a mill. What with his knowledge gained by readin' the weekly papers from A to Z jest as regular as they come, he has accumulated an eddication sech as should place him in most any good position in the

city. But there ain't no use tryin' to get him away from this North country; none 't all. Here he will stay come sleet er rain, storm er sunshine. Take him away from the smell o' the woods an' the call o' the birds an' he will go all to pieces. An' so we are stickin' close to Lookup."

The banker tapped a crust of toast with his fork, musingly. "I can quite understand how a man's environment will sometimes become quite as much a part of him as his hide," he said. "Remove him from it and he's useless. Take me, for instance, I was born in the city, down yonder, raised in it, have lived in it all my life, you might say, until I've grown to it and am unhappy when away from its jangle and smoke and lights. It's a fact."

"So that you be feelin' like a pollywog out of water, up here," sympathized Ma Washburn. "Yes, I know, I know, but," — she smiled and nodded her head, — "there's plenty of city folks come up here thinkin' that way has changed their minds. Ain't that right, Pa?"

"Fully nine outen a dozen," agreed her husband, rousing from his reverie. "Fact is, nobody from the city seems to fit this here place at first, like; but, by the flat-tailed beaver! you ort to see 'em grow inter it, you jest ort! Take that man Dorkin, fer instance, — there's a sample of graftin' of decayed civilization onto rugged wilderness sech as you don't see every day, let me tell ye!"

The girl looked up quickly. "Dorkin," she re-

peated; "why, I've heard of him. Is n't he a young giant of a man who has a domain of his own up here in the woods somewhere, and who commands respect because of his great strength and promptness in punishing intruders? Mr. French was telling us about this man, you remember, Uncle?"

The banker nodded. "Yes, we have heard of this man Dorkin," he said. "He keeps a sort of wild animal Preserve, does n't he? Makes a good living, I understand, by selling animals to zoos. What sort of a man is he, Mr. Washburn?"

Pa Washburn leaned his elbows on the table and fastened his blue eyes on the banker. "Let me tell you somethin'," he said quietly and impressively. "He's a real man; *a real man.*"

He pushed his chair back from the table and going to the door, threw it open. "Look out yonder," he cried. "See that big sweepin' woods? See them little streams stringin' down that hillside? Feel that breeze smellin' of vines and leaves and pine needles? — Wall, them things is what remade him, *they remade him!*" He paused, turning about with a challenge in his blue orbs.

The girl sat with eyes wide, lips a little apart. Something of the native zealot's flame had caught her own spirit. Her uncle was leaning a little farther across the table, the fork in his slender fingers motionless.

"You mean — ?" he asked, looking up slowly.

"I mean that what Gawd had intended to be a

big man *was spoiled in your city.* He came here a very wreck of a bein', the skin hangin' to his big frame, his arms shot full of blue punctures made by a dope-needle, his nerves completely shattered, an' his soul dead as a grass root on a winter hill. An' he told me his story. Gawd, it was an awful story, an' if I cried like a baby, I'm not ashamed to own it."

Mr. Washburn turned towards the doorway again, and his wife rose hastily, murmuring something about "havin' to see to things in the cellar."

The girl saw that her eyes were full of tears and, oddly, a strange choking lump came into her own throat so that she found it difficult to make the request: "Please tell us about him, Mr. Washburn."

"There ain't much to tell," said the man, coming back to his seat, "'ceptin' that he come here broken in body an' spirit, a victim to opium er morphine er some like drug. He told me all about it, how the habit first started, how it grew on him, an' how it downed him. He was fittin' himself fer law er some sech profession. Took good marks at all his examinations an' all that, but with the cravin' fer the drug growin' stronger an' stronger. An' then he went down with a crash. Two nights afore the final examination, — that was what Dorkin called it, — some one of them professor chaps found that some student had broke into his desk an' stole a copy of the examination papers.

"'Course you know without me tellin' ye that them papers was found in Dorkin's room. It was

useless fer him to deny his guilt; everythin' pointed to it, so he had to leave the college in disgrace. Everybody turned ag'in him, even them who had been his closest pals. He did n't have no spirit left to fight the drug — simply gave himself up to it, he did. Then, jest afore the end, he come up here."

The native brushed his fingers through his bristling red goatee, and smiled.

"Then he come up here," he repeated, "an' I was at the station the night he arrived.

"I saw a big, thin-cheeked, hollow-eyed young feller tumble off the train an' stan' lookin' about him, dazed like. I went up an' spoke to him. He looked at me like a man in a dream, an' said: —

"'Would you mind tellin' me the name of this place?' He said it so simple an' there was sech a softness an' wistfulness in the voice, that I took to him at once.

"'This here is Lookup,' says I.

"'Lookup,' says he, an' then again he says, 'Lookup,' as though he was tryin' to fix the name in his mind.

"'Might be you've got off the wrong stop?' I suggests. He shook his head. 'I've allers got off at the wrong stop, friend,' he says, an' then again he whispers 'Lookup,' jest as though he liked the name. He sort o' rolled it in his mouth, ye know, tastin' it like, an' when he said it, he said it low as though it pleased him mightily.

"'Are ye comin' down to the Settlement?' I asks.

He looked at me, er looked down at me, fer I must say he was a tall, big-shouldered feller, though thin an' shaky, an' my old heart felt mighty sorry fer him 'cause I took him fer a 'lunger,' ye see, an' I'd seen plenty of 'em come an' few of 'em go.

"'What's your name?' he asked me, an' I told him.

"'Mr. Washburn,' says he, 'I like your looks an' I'm goin' to tell you somethin' jest on that account. I'm a fugitive,' says he, slow and impressive, 'an' I want to go in hidin' up here in this woods.'

"I reckon I must have started at that, fer he put his hands on my shoulders an' says with a queer little smile that had pain behind it: —

"'Not a fugitive from the law, but from myself. Did you ever hear of a drug-fiend?' he says.

"I nodded.

"'Wall, I'm one,' he says, 'an' — I'm jest about under.'

"He took his hands from my shoulders an' fumbled in an inside pocket of his coat. I remember it was a spring night, an' the sun had left a tiny string of tracks in the sky above Old Creation Hills, an' he stood facin' the lights so that his white face showed up powerful pitiful. I felt my heart warmin' to that big, broken youngster, an' when he put a pocket-book in my hands I stood thar swallerin' hard an' tryin' to say somethin'.

"'There's money in that,' he says, 'quite a tidy sum of it. I don't want it. It's yours, if you'll

take me back with you an' stay by me till I cave in.'

"'You mean take you back with me to Lookup?' I asks.

"'Yes,' says he, drawin' himself up an' tossin' his head, 'Lookup.' Then he said it again, jest like he said it afore, slow an' soft like, 'Lookup.'

"I handed him back his wallet an' picked up his bag. 'You're welcome to come along,' says I, 'but not that way. We don't need a whole lot of money up here. All you kin do is pay us your board, same's other people, an' we'll help you fight back,' says I.

"'Will ye?' he says, eager like, 'will ye?'

"'I've said we would,' I answers. 'There's the democrat an' there's old Moll an' Bess, best plugs in the Settlement, an' there's a nice clean bed up home, an' a nice supper, an' a woman as is a woman who'll make you ferget a lot of the things you've learned.'

"We was 'longside my rig by now an' I motioned him to climb up; but he stood there lookin' at me an' through me. His face was whiter an' more drawed an' his eyes looked more sunk, I thought.

"'Weak, eh?' I asks, puttin' my hand beneath his elbow to help him up.

"'Wait,' he says, drawin' back. He stood fer a minute er two grittin' his teeth, his face gettin' whiter an' his hands shakier. Then he jerked back with a little growl like a hurt dog would make, an' held out his left arm. 'Look,' he says, 'see them little blue marks?'

"'Yes,' I says, 'I see 'em.'

"'Wall,' says he, 'them was made by the needle. Put your hand in my inside pocket an' take out that leather case,' he says. 'Hurry, man, afore I change my mind.'

"I did what he asked, wonderin' if he was n't jest a little off his head, but feelin' too much pity fer him to repent of my bargain.

"I took out the little leather book an' stood fumblin' with it.

"'Open it,' he says, an' I opened it. There, inside it, lay three tiny bottles an' a leetle shiny instrument which I learned later was called a hypodermic syringe.

"'What's these?' I asked.

"He looked at me an' then his eyes dropped to the leather book.

"'They're *hell*, *damnation*, *death*,' he shivers. 'Throw 'em away! Tramp on 'em!' he screams, an' almost afore the words was out of his mouth I'd dashed 'em on the rocks an' ground my heel on 'em.

"'Down with *hell*, *damnation*, and *death!*' says I, thinkin' it best to humor him; but he was n't hearin'. He sort o' swayed, and afore I knowed it he was down before them smashed bottles, gatherin' up the splinters an' weepin' an' wailin' over 'em as though they were his very life.

"I went over to the station an' got big Bill Stover, the agent, to help me put him in the rig; then I took him home here."

Pa Washburn paused and felt for his pipe.

"I ain't goin' to prolong this story none," he said. "All I'm goin' to say is this. That wreck of a man was Dorkin, an' fer a long time it was which an' t' other would win, all that hell he'd soaked his frame with er all this," — he waved towards the spicy, cloud-flecked out-of-doors.

"But Lookup won at last. I never saw sech a change worked in a man afore or since. To-day there ain't no two men in this here Settlement can lift an' carry the load Dorkin kin. He's mighty well liked by everybody, too, barrin' a few outlaw trappers sech as Dalton's gang, an' one er two others who are jealous of him on account of his ownin' a sort of private Preserve.

"Way he came to get that Preserve is this. Jest about the time he was able to get up an' about a leetle, he fished an old man by the name of McGregor from the Flat Rapids. It was a mighty plucky rescue, too, an' McGregor allers felt he'd like to even things up with Dorkin. So here is what he does: —

"Mac had got hold of about a thousand acres of hardwood timber from the Government, some way, an' after lookin' it over had come to the conclusion that it would n't pay him very big to tote it across to his mills, here. He did think somethin' about puttin' a 'portable' up in the timber, but there ag'in he was up against gettin' the lumber down. So, bein' a Scotchman, an' canny like, he suggests to

Dorkin that he buy that strip at jest about one half what it had cost him. Dorkin buys it, more I do believe to accommodate old Mac than anything else, — an' here's the funny part of it. When he got real strong ag'in, an' able to get around, he took to roamin' through the woods, an' sometimes he would come in with the greatest stories of what he had seen the wild animals and birds doin'. He used to make us laugh with his description, an' one night as him and me set here on the porch, smokin', he says: —

"'Pop,' — he allers called me 'Pop,' — 'Pop,' says he, 'I'm goin' in to rearin' animals an' birds.'

"I looked at him sharp, thinkin' this was a sign that the old cravin' was comin' back on him, but his eyes was bright an' his skin clear as a bell.

"'I'm goin' to stake off my limit an' put up "No Trespassin'" signs,' he says, 'an' afore long I'll have a little kingdom brimful of wild things.'

"'You'll have a big carcass brimful o' bullets, more likely,' says I, thinkin' of Dalton an' them other outlaw trappers. 'What do you suppose old Daddy Farney an' the others will do to you if you put up "*keep off*" signs?'

"'Why, I've talked it over with Daddy Farney, an' he thinks it's a good scheme,' he answers. 'Anyway, I'm goin' to try it.'

Pa Washburn laughed quietly.

"Wall, he did try it. That was five years ago, an' I will say Dorkin has worked wonders up thar in his

Preserve. Has the finest cabins you ever set eyes on, an' animals — why, they eat outen his hand. A Frenchman named LaPeer, an' his wife, Marie, help him, up there. The man looks after the wild things an' the woman keeps house fer the two of 'em.

"Last year Dorkin shipped six thousand dollars' worth of animals to different points, an' this year, long about September er October, he reckons he'll ship as many more. You, both of ye, orter see his Hardwoods Retreat. We'll go up thar soon, if ye like. It's quite a piece by canoe an' portage, but a nice trip now the things have started growin'; what ye say?"

Dayton was sitting bent forward, an attentive listener. Now he sat up and nodded. "I should like it very much, indeed," he said.

But the girl sat, lips parted, violet eyes filled with a far-away expression. She was picturing over again a battle that a man had made for freedom, a battle hardly fought, valiantly won. When she rose from the table there was a flush on her cheeks. "Can it be?" she mused; "I wonder, can it be?"

She picked up her portfolio and brushes and walked out into the warm May sunlight. Far across the deep lake the hills of Old Creation were splashed with the warm glories of the morning. A flock of wild ducks were feeding out on the lake, splashing, diving, swimming in and out and marking strange patterns of brown and black on the limpid foreground of water.

Edna followed the path to the lake and started skirting its clear-fringed shore. She was still thinking of the man who had made the gallant fight against a weakness and had won, when, half an hour later, she turned a bend in the path and came face to face with a tall, thin young man whose lean face mirrored the furtiveness of the forest. They stood for a moment gazing at each other, then Edna flashed him a smile.

"I beg your pardon," she spoke, "but are you Tommie Washburn, the Temagami Ranger?"

The boy shook his head. "My name's Farney," he informed her; "our trappin' grounds lay away up yonder." He jerked his thumb over his shoulder towards the grey-blue sweep of the hardwood Highlands, miles distant. "What might your name be?" he asked.

"Edna Marsh," she answered, amused at the native directness of the question.

"You're a pretty gal," he said gravely. "You've got damn nice eyes."

Edna colored and laughed an embarrassed little laugh. "Your name is Dannie, is n't it?" she inquired, ignoring the unconventional compliment. "Mr. Washburn was speaking of you only this morning."

He nodded. "Some calls me Dannie, and some Satan, Miss. What does Satan mean, d' ye know?" he asked with sudden directness.

"Why," said Edna hesitatingly, "it — the fact is

it is n't a nice name to call anybody. It's another name for the Devil, you see."

"Oh!" a flicker of a smile flashed across the grave face. "I've allers sorter hankered to know what the name meant. Willer said as she figured it meant somethin' outen the ordinary an' it seems she was right. Willer's my sister," he explained proudly. "She's got another name too. She's called The Wisp. She's eighteen years old nearly, *an' she's simply hell with the rifle.*"

Edna fell back, with a little gasp. The lad looked surprised. "Maybe I be sayin' things as you can't get the right swing onter," he apologized. "Pop Washburn never lets me talk none too much to the folks he has at his place, 'less he's around to sorter smooth over my rough spots. I guess maybe I've said somethin' that jars on you, Miss; if so, I'm sorry."

"It's all right," said Edna quickly. "Please don't mind me. Tell me some more about Willow, I'm interested in her."

"Why, she's about everythin' you'd want to see in a gal, Willer is," he said, gravely. "She plays the fiddle like it could talk; she kin swim three miles without restin'; she kin paddle with any Injun in this country, an' she don't give a — she don't care what anybody thinks, so long as she thinks her own way. That's Willer up an' down, Miss. You'd like her awful, I know you would, but there's no tellin' if she'd like you. She's some strange that there way."

"I shall try and make her like me, Dannie," cried Edna enthusiastically. "Are you going down to Mr. Washburn's?" she inquired.

"Why, yes, I be," answered Dannie. "Dorkin, he allers looks fer me to come on down on Wednesdays and get his letters an' newspapers. Don't know Dorkin, do you?" he asked, his eyes on Edna's face.

"No," she replied, her cheeks glowing, "but I hope to, soon."

"Sure!" he exclaimed heartily. "Well, you'll find him jest what everybody says he is, 'some man.'"

The lad's eyes had fastened themselves questioningly on the portfolio beneath the girl's arm. Understanding, she drew it forth and opened it, displaying to his astonished gaze a woodland picture which she had painted a season ago.

"Did you make that?" he asked wonderingly.

"Yes," she answered, glad of the true praise she saw mirrored in his eyes.

"An' you intend puttin' down some of these trees an' hills an' lakes, that-a-way?" he asked eagerly.

"Yes. This is called a painting," she explained; "and the one who puts it down, as you say, is called a painter."

He sighed and gazed about him. "Look," he said, pointing to the farther shore of the calm lake. "See them shadders, down there?"

Edna looked. All along the shore, from the limpid depths of the lake was mirrored a wonderful picture of trees and rocks.

"That's about as near the real thing as you kin get it, I guess maybe," said the lad, "ain't it?"

"You are right," she answered, impressed by his earnestness.

He stood erect and gazed all about him. He drew in the smells of the forest in a long breath. When he looked at her again there was a strange tenderness in his eyes.

"But pictures ain't *all this*," he sighed. "I guess the best painter in the world would have to leave a whole lot outen his picture."

He picked up the rifle which he had stood against a tree, and passed down the path leading to Lookup.

# CHAPTER VII

DORKIN'S PRESERVE lay between two great lakes on the highest part of the Ontario Highlands, a strip of beautiful hardwoods nine miles long by three wide. Why Nature, ever a whimsical mother, had seen fit to strew those sloping uplands, which by right of heritage belonged to the coniferous trees, with sturdy beech, maple, and hickory, will never be known. Perhaps in one of her freakish moods she did it, or, it may be that the golden trails of sunset, stretching from far-off Old Creation Hills, begged her for this blue-green runway across the deeper green of the tamaracks, that they might race there with the swift-footed shadows of the twilights.

It was a glorious, beautiful strip of forest. Shaggy-topped beeches with gnarled old bodies interlocked branches with straight-limbed maples; sturdy oaks whispered sibilant messages up to tall hickories. Beneath them, over mosses and fern, rested the blue drab hush of the shagland day; subdued, softened, scented; pregnant with life, quivering with the motion of eternal evolution.

And just as she scatters little pockets of gold here and there about the crevices in which she hides the mother lode, so Nature had scattered little miniature groves and splashes of hardwoods far, far down through the neighboring valleys and uplands north-

ward. In these mixed timbers the trappers had their grounds. Along the swift streams, on the shores of tiny lakes, in the vast marshlands of the swales, they reaped, spring and winter, the harvest of furs that meant to them existence.

But wild things are wise, sagacious, cunning. No man has yet been able to define that marvellous instinct which guides them from the danger zone into places of protection.

Throughout the great forest ran a whisper that safety lay in the golden uplands. Far down along the cedar-hedged lake of Timochouch, in a grotto deep beneath an outstanding crag, a mother mink, nursing her five blind kittens, received the mysterious summons. Later, she hid her kittens in a burrow beneath the roots of a great tree standing above a clear stream in the Hardwoods Preserve.

A fierce-eyed fisher, prowling on the moon-painted shore of his waterway, heard the whisper, and with his mate sought the hardwoods. A red fox skulking among the cedars deserted her den beneath the fringed creek of the lowland, and in a burrow of the Highlands brought up her family of six puppies.

And thus, gradually, many of the animals and game birds, until now fear-haunted and man-hunted, came into the Retreat which Dorkin had made for them.

There, the muskrats of the swales found marshlands to their liking. A few stealthy lynxes, finding the grouse-lands growing less fruitful, and learning

that the birds had moved to the uplands, followed. The red deer browsed among the second growth of beech and birch, unmolested. Even those grey, gaunt prowlers, the wolves, came suspiciously into the kingdom only to learn that they alone, of all the wild kindred, were ostracized from the forest haven; so that, disappointed in their desire to tear down and destroy, they slunk away from the hardwoods in which lurked a deadly menace to their lives.

All about the border of the Preserve, Dorkin had tacked notices which read: "This is a private preserve. Trespassers will be punished according to law."

The placing of these notices, as he rightly conjectured, was at once resented by the more daring of the trappers. They were torn down, only to be replaced by fresh ones. These went the way of the others. Then Dorkin called his helper, LaPeer, and said: —

"These notices of ours don't seem to have hit the popular sentiment, Pete. What do our neighbors object to about them, do you suppose?"

The Frenchman scratched his head.

"Dey don' lak any of 'em mooch, I guess," he grinned, "but I t'ink dey lak dis part here least of all." He pointed to the words "according to law," staring up from one of the torn notices.

"Oh," frowned Dorkin, "they don't like the law business, eh? Well, we'll fix that to suit them, Pete.

I'm glad you suggested it; it makes it simpler for me."

The notices Dorkin next nailed up read: "This is a private preserve. Trespassers will be punished."

On the morning following the placing of these, he came across a trapper by the name of Simmons, busily engaged in tearing one of the notices from the tree. The man's action was deliberate. Succeeding at length in ripping off the board, he threw it down on the sward; then picking up his rifle he looked about him as though in search of further devastation. Dorkin, who had stepped behind a big beech, waited until the trapper was opposite to him: then reaching out he gripped him behind the neck and choked him until his rifle fell to the ground. Simmons, who, although a sizable man, was no match for the other's strength, stamped and cursed in pain, but to no avail. Dorkin shook him, slapped his face, and finally, with a kick, sent him sprawling a dozen yards away, just outside the Preserve bounds.

The trapper sat up, gazed blankly about him, and then rose shakingly to his feet.

"You don't like my notices, I see?" said Dorkin cheerfully. "Well, you leave them alone, hear me? You fellows all leave them alone. Did you read it?" he asked, pointing to the one the man had lately pulled off.

The trespasser nodded sulkily.

"Well, read it to me now."

"You go to hell," growled Simmons.

Dorkin took a step forward. "Read it to me now," he repeated.

This time the trapper hastened to execute the order.

"Maybe you thought those last four words were just a little joke?" said Dorkin when the other concluded. "Well, you've learned better. Hereafter, you and all others are to leave those notices alone. I guess that's all — so get!"

He pointed away towards the lowlands, but the trapper did not move. "Give me my gun," he demanded.

"You don't get it," returned Dorkin. "It's confiscated."

"I want it," cried the trapper, with an oath, "an' I'm goin' ter have it."

"Oh, are you?" Dorkin pointed to the rifle on the moss. "Then suppose you come inside and get it?" he invited.

"I'm not a-comin' in there no more," growled Simmons. "You hand it out to me."

"Say, Simmons," said Dorkin gently. "I want to tell you something and you can tell the rest of your gang, if you like. It will maybe save trouble and some sore feelings. What I've just done to you I'll do to any man I find snooping about my grounds. This Preserve is mine, and I can do what I choose with it. I don't molest you fellows and I won't be molested by any of you. Now that goes! And see here!" He turned, and picking up the rifle, handed

it to the humiliated trapper. "I give you back your gun, this time, because I know you did n't molest my property of your own free will. I know somebody else is behind you, and I think you ought to tell me who it is."

Simmons frowned and shook his head. "I'll not split," he growled.

"Well, you need n't. I have little use for you now, but I'd have even less if you did that. Anyhow, I know who is behind all this; it's Dalton."

"I did n't say it was."

"No, you did n't; nevertheless, I know."

"You would n't handle Abe Dalton quite so easy as you did me," whined Simmons. "He's some man, is Dalton."

"That remains to be seen," smiled Dorkin. "I'll just say this much, though: if I catch him up here on my Preserve, I'm going to find out just how much of a man he *is*. You tell him that for me." He laughed at the baffled expression on the other's face. "Look here, Simmons," he said quietly, "Dalton has n't got any courage, and you know it. He never takes any chances himself, but gets one of you fellows to take them for him. I've just given you what you deserved, but I'll tell you something. I respect you for the nerve you've shown and I don't want you to get in wrong on Dalton's account. Take my advice and break away from him. By the way, I'll trouble you to put that notice back where you found it." He pointed to the card

gleaming up from the moss, then strode away among the trees.

Thereafter the notices remained unmolested. Not that certain of the trappers, with a personal grievance against Dorkin for establishing a kingdom and a law unto himself, did not long to usurp the fertile hunting and trapping grounds from which they were barred, but because they had learned thoroughly that Dorkin was quite capable of taking care of his own and had a way of keeping his promises.

Some of them, more reasonable than the others, even accepted the big woodsman's overtures of friendship and came often to visit him at the cabin in the grove. His strong personality, his colossal physical strength, and his marvellous power over the wild things, won their respect, and in their rough way they liked him a great deal.

Dorkin had been in the Northern forest lands five years now, five wonderful, beautiful years of life, where life was fullest and grandest and best.

Remoulded by the sympathetic fingers of the great Mother, his physical self had become the very embodiment of perfect manhood which had about it the ruggedness of the oak, and the symmetry of the hickory. Nature had, indeed, been kind to him, and he loved her for it. In his heart he said to her throughout each glad day of life, "You have saved me and I shall never stray away from you again."

He had never known the fulness of life before. He had thought life something of a struggle after that

not easily attained, a reaching through and above the clouds for a bubble that danced always a little beyond one's reach. Now he knew that life was health and the power to taste and know and feel — particularly to feel.

He wondered sometimes if those men in the city, — that grinding, pulsating place of crowds and jar and smoke, — if those men who directed the channels of learning, business, and finance, realized the artificialness of it all.

With him there was no longing to know more than what he saw and knew after his own fashion. Those white stars that hung low above the tree-spiked open were simply glorious stars, made to blink out of the dusk, grow golden in the deepening shadow, and sing out in the hushed night with a melody atune with the eternal chord upon which hung all the harmony of his world.

So it was with the winds, the breeze, the streams, and all the atoms of all the perfected parts of all his great world: he accepted them as he found them. He breathed, listened, felt; above all, he lived. He was a primitive man with ruddy life in his veins, a great and beautiful love in his heart for his environment; and every morning, as he stood watching the lighting skies in the east, his soul sang its wild prayer to an infinite Something which he knew was God and God's.

Seldom if ever did he allow himself to think of the other world in which he had fought and failed and

well-nigh gone down. At first he had found it hard to forget; the drab thread of past memories would protrude itself at times and spoil the golden web of peaceful dreams. That was because spiritual regeneration is slower than physical; because certain diseases can be cured only in the Great Operating Room.

Five years as keeper of the Retreat and he was happy, contented, successful. Five happy years. Dorkin smiled at the thought of how peaceful, how happy they had been. He hoped nothing would ever occur to bring the past back before him. He had just about outlived it, almost obliterated it from his mind — all save one little chapter that could not be forgotten, quite.

He could not forget the disgrace, the degradation he had suffered back there in the city, could not forget what he, an innocent man, had endured for the crime of another. And then there was a face that came up and stood before his eyes whenever this memory forced itself upon him. Oddly he had always associated his disgrace and this man together. He had always thought that Timberley was, in some way, responsible for his passing out.

But to-day, as he walked through the spicy hardwoods, even that cloud seemed less sombre and something more vaguely indefinite than it had hitherto been. Perhaps it was because of the new spring-time warmth in the air; the sweet-smelling wild flowers and the bird-music that throbbed and

twittered on every hand. Perhaps, too, he caught the infectious happiness of his wild children who were all about him, his furred and feathered friends, old and young, playing and enjoying in full the strained sunlight and balmy breezes.

The silver grey fox and her puppies rolled on the sward together beneath a copse of wild hazelnut. A little beyond them a big raccoon and four little grey balls, with tiny rings about their tails, lay fast asleep in the sunlight.

Down in a small lake he heard a glorious splashing and knew that the old mink, whose den was deep in the bank, had taken her family of kittens out for a morning swim. From a big beech, close beside him, a cock grouse clucked his challenge to the uncaring fox beneath him.

Dorkin stood still, a smile on his face, a deepening wonder in his breast. It was all so wonderful to him; each and every day it grew more wonderful. These things had come into his Retreat, wild, frantic, fearing things. What a difference to-day! He drew in a long breath. In it he tasted the soul of budding tree and shooting plant. It was like the sweetest nectar to him, and he laughed softly, for sheer joy of it all, as he passed on up the path to his cabin.

As he turned a corner of the path and came into the open a big man, dressed in grey tweeds, rose from his seat on an elm block and stood before him. "Stanley, by God," the man muttered, his face paling a trifle.

Dorkin paused, and a deep red mounted to his temples. He took a quick step forward, his hands clenched and his jaw set. Simultaneously with his action the other man recoiled. Big as he was, before Dorkin's giant frame he seemed diminutive.

"You," commenced Dorkin, "You —" The growl choked in his throat, and the other held up his hand.

"Don't say it," he advised. "Not that I care; but if you say it you will violate the hospitality of this," — he waved his hand about, —"and I understand that would be an unpardonable thing to do, up here."

"Timberley, why are you here?" asked Dorkin, striving to keep his voice steady.

The other laughed shortly. "Suppose I say that in making this visit I have been actuated solely through a feeling of friendship?"

"Then I would say that you are still a liar," answered the woodsman quietly.

"Oh," with a shrug, "still caustic, I see. I thought perhaps this wilderness stuff, of which we hear so much, might have softened you, in a way."

"It has not, as far as you are concerned, at least. And my memory is still good. Once more I ask you, why are you here?"

"Suppose I answer your question by asking another. Why are *you* here, Stanley, and living under another name?"

The words were coldly insolent. Dorkin, with an effort, allowed them to pass.

He scrutinized the face before him with probing eyes. What he saw were strong, even features dark to swarthiness, a good mouth, and an aggressive chin. The eyes were dark and clear with the shadow of vindictiveness in their depths; but on the whole, it was a good-looking face.

With a shrug and a short laugh the visitor seated himself on a block beneath a wild-hop vine. The morning sunlight streaming through the trees fell on his face. He removed his Stetson and let the warmth wash his waving, reddish-brown hair. During the woodsman's scrutiny his eyes had gazed squarely back, meeting question with question.

The Irish setter floundered up the path, his long hair wet from his morning plunge in the lake. He rubbed his cold nose against Dorkin's hand, and, bounding up to the other man, laid his head on his knee.

The man stroked the silken head; then with an odd little laugh glanced across at Dorkin.

"Dogs make a mistake in me," he said; "*all* dogs make a mistake in me," he supplemented, a hint of bitterness in his voice. "They are supposed to possess a greater intuition than man, too; still, they seem to trust me, which is more than most men do. Strange, eh? How do you account for it?" he asked lightly.

"Timberley," said Dorkin tensely, "is it necessary to ask me that question? You know our relationship one to the other. You know why it is so.

You seek me out; you assume the air of friendship you do not feel. Again I ask, why are you here?"

"Well, I'll tell you. I'm here on behalf of a friend of mine who wishes to buy some wild animals from you."

"I have none for sale."

A flicker of a smile crossed the other's face. "We expected you to say that," he said. "You're hard-headed all right, and know your business, know how to sell; but we're ready to meet you. Name your price."

"I said I had no wild animals for sale," repeated Dorkin; "I mean what I say."

Timberley stared. "Why, I understood that was your business," he frowned, "raising wild things for sale. Have I been misinformed?"

"Not exactly. I do sell them, but I first of all know where they are going and into whose hands I am placing them."

"Oh," Timberley gave a relieved sigh. "That's a simple matter. I don't mind in the least telling you the name of the company for whom my friend is buying."

Dorkin shook his head. "It's no use," he said. "I won't sell any of my animals at this time of the year."

"But why, in God's name?" cried the other.

"It's their breeding season," answered Dorkin. "I won't part them, neither will I take the young

from their mothers. Nothing leaves Hardwoods Retreat before October. I'm sorry you and your friend did n't know this before; it might have saved you a useless trip."

Timberley chewed an unlighted cigar thoughtfully. "Look here," he jerked out finally, "my friend is in a devil of a mess if you won't let him have those animals. Fact is he's under contract to deliver them to Dever and Strads Shows, New York, inside of two weeks."

"I guess he'll have to break the contract if he's depending on me," said Dorkin.

"He'll pay you your own price," urged Timberley eagerly.

"I'm sorry, but I can't break a rule of this Preserve; that's final."

"You're sure?"

"Positively sure."

Timberley eyed the woodsman intently, then turned away with a shrug. He stood chewing his cigar, thinking deeply. When he turned once more towards Dorkin, his color had deepened and there was a sneer on his face as he asked: —

"You have n't any particular use for me, have you?"

"I'm afraid not," returned Dorkin, quietly; "but that's your own fault, as you well know."

Timberley gazed upon the huge form of the man before him, marked the strength underlying the long, smooth muscles in the folded arms, the power be-

hind those searching eyes, and something like admiration kindled in his face.

"There's an old saying," he said softly, speaking as though to himself, "an old adage which we used to write in our copy-books, at school. I think you'll remember it. It is: 'Man proposes and God disposes.' I'm going to tell you something. It was I who got you pushed out of college. I admit it. I tried my damnedest to put you down and out for good. Once upon a time I liked you. Funny, eh? — but I did like you. I can't help my Indian nature. I'd rather die any time than leave an injury unpaid. You did me an injury. You whipped me before the class, humiliated me before — Well, never mind that, it was n't for that I spoiled your life's chances. You did me a great injury. You stole from me the affections of the girl I loved. I sought revenge. I succeeded, or thought I did. You were something I sought to wipe away, — wipe away."

He looked down at his strong hands, a smile playing on his face. Then once again he looked at Dorkin.

"Man proposes," he laughed sinisterly. He spread out his hands in a mocking gesture. "And then God takes a hand and rebuilds, reshapes, and —" He ceased speaking and bent above the dog, who had watched him silently.

"You went out," he said softly, speaking from this position. "You went out like a candle that has burned to a blue spark in a draft. That draft was

morphine. God, how it ate you away, after I had disgraced you and sent you from the college in degradation! But I had to do it, the desire claimed me. It may seem strange, unbelievable, that I did this thing without in the least hating you; rather, I believe I still liked you. It was a debt I had to pay and I paid it; although in the end I lost her," he added half sadly. "Lost her because — unlike this dog — she could not trust me."

He sighed, then shook himself together and squared his shoulders. "I'm a peculiar sort of devil as you know," he said, his tone a challenge. "It was I who spoiled your other life. If I have exacted too great a payment, why, I am here to answer for it."

Slowly, while Timberley was speaking, a greyish whiteness had stolen to Dorkin's face. Now the bunched muscles beneath his doeskin jacket were tingling. An icy hand seemed to grip his heart and a red mist swooped down and obliterated the glories of his world. He heard the other's voice as though strained through roaring waters.

Often he had asked himself the question — What should he do if he and that man who had caused his disgrace met face to face? He had been afraid to answer. Now in reality the question must be answered once and for all time.

The red mist was deepening. The roar of the cataract was growing louder. Dimly he saw the man who had forced him into exile, standing there on the

heaving sward before him. And his heart shouted, "Kill! Kill!"

He took a quick step forward towards Timberley; then he stopped still, his arms shuddering to his sides, his head sagging.

Somewhere, from the dim aisles of his world, came wafted the strains of a violin. Its wailing tenderness reached for his very soul and gripped it, held it, subdued it. With a sob he came back to his world of realities, his scented world that had reclaimed him.

He raised an arm and brushed the cold sweat from his forehead. Then he pointed down the pathway.

"Go," he said hoarsely; "for God's sake, go, and do not come here again."

Timberley, his face white, turned half towards the path; then as suddenly he turned again, in his eyes a look of mingled subjection, admiration, wistfulness.

He took a step towards Dorkin with hand outstretched, then stood rooted to the spot.

From out the thicket that hedged the grove there bounded a great grey animal with round head set with tufted ears and big blazing eyes. With a snarl it sank, belly close to earth, and crept slowly towards Timberley. But even as the big lynx pierced the sward with long claws preparatory to making the spring, Dorkin acted. Like a flash he leaped forward and grasped the great cat by the neck. She turned with a spitting snarl, then lay shuddering,

her amber eyes still on Timberley's face. With his free arm Dorkin pointed towards the lake.

Timberley backed slowly away until he felt the path beneath his feet. Then he spoke. "Of course, if it's to be a fight, so be it. Hereafter, I'm out to get you and yours, my friend, and so I warn you."

Not until he was safe in his canoe, and his Indian guide had put a good distance between him and the shore, did Timberley breathe easily. Then, twisting about, he gazed sombrely back across the hardwood forest stretching like a pale-green ribbon across the deeper verdancy of the coniferous trees.

"Musko," he said, addressing the Indian, "if you had tried to buy, at a big price, something belonging to another man, and he refused to do business, what would you do?"

The Indian grunted and paddled steadily for some moments before he answered, "I go to Abe Dalton and say, get um, ugh."

"Musko," said Timberley admiringly, "you're a sensible man."

Once more his eyes turned towards the hardwoods, now melting and blending softly with the firs and tamaracks in the far distance.

He sank back comfortably on the bearskin in the canoe's bottom and gave himself up to reflection. "Well," he mused grimly, "I never expected to find this young savage of an animal keeper and Francis Stanley one and the same, I'll be jiggered if I did. Talk about putting one's head into a lion's mouth,

egad! I did it with a vengeance. I'm a damn fool, anyway. I'll never come nearer getting killed, and miss it, than I did to-day." He threw the much masticated cigar away and drew his pipe from his pocket.

His eyes swept the placid lake, marking the rush-lined shallows, the dusky cloud-shadows swimming in the depths, the forest-crowned shores rising height on height, and lastly, the round, blue-tinged peaks of Old Creation Hills standing sentinel of the woods and waterways of the boundless shagland.

"Musko," he asked, his eyes on the mountain peak, "how long have you lived in this forest?"

"Heap long time," grunted the Indian. "All the time I live here."

Timberley smiled. Something indefinable gripped him tight and held him as in a vise to face the strange reality of a bigness, a sublimity that awed and overpowered. His empty pipe was clenched between his teeth.

"Think of it," he said, half aloud, "think of it working that change in a man. He came here broken in body and spirit. It took hold of him and remade him, that's what it did."

"You speak?" asked the Indian.

Timberley sat erect. "Yes," he said, "I spoke. I asked you if you were a Christian, Musko?"

"No, Cree," answered the guide proudly.

"Oh!" Timberley filled his pipe, lighted it, and smoked quietly. By and by he asked another ques-

tion. "Who made all this forest and these lakes, Musko?" It surprised him to hear himself asking these questions, but it relieved him. He must say something.

The Indian had drawn in his paddle and sat looking at Timberley gravely.

"Me no understand," he said. "You say um some more."

Timberley twisted his head so as to watch his guide. "I asked you who made all this big forest and these lakes?" he repeated.

"Injun no tell," returned Musko. "Heap big woods and lakes here before Musko."

"You mean to say you have never heard of God?" asked Timberley sternly. "Well, you must be a" — he checked himself — "a heathen," he finished, "a primitive savage for sure."

The Indian flashed him a look of resentment. "Ugh! Me say God same's white man, me say um when canoe snag, when camp-fire burn blanket. Musko swear God some and damn lots, same as Dalton and white trapper. Him no savage what you call um, no."

Timberley shook his head. "Your religious training has been sadly neglected, my red-skinned friend," he said with mock sadness. "When I get through with the work in hand I'll start a little missionary society up here. Run the canoe into yonder lagoon, Musko. I promised to pick up my amiable friend, Haight, somewhere hereabouts."

As he spoke a man stepped from among the cedars lining the shore and stood waiting for the canoe to beach. He was of middle age with hair white at the temples. Like Timberley, he was dressed in tweeds. His face was long and wore an habitual scowl. He stepped forward as the boat grated on the pebbles.

"It's a wonder you came back at all," he said snappishly. "What luck up yonder?"

Timberley stepped from the canoe and knocked the ashes from his pipe before he answered.

Then he said gently, "My dear fellow, I had the very best of luck."

"Then you got away with it?" eagerly.

"It?" Timberley raised his brows. "Oh, yes, I got away with it, although for a minute or two I was not quite sure that I would." He laughed shortly. Then, noting the other's darkening face, he threw his forced levity from him with a shrug.

"There's no use trying to do business with that man Dorkin, Bob," he said crisply. "He won't sell us so much as a mangy chipmunk."

"He won't? Why — why, you just said that you got away with it."

"Meaning my life, Bob; and let me tell you, I was lucky, believe me, I was. If you ever happen to see a big fat baby toddle up against a rattlesnake, you might think of me facing that long-haired tiger in his den. Do you know who that man Dorkin is?" he asked sharply.

"No, I don't," answered the other sourly, "and

what's more I don't care the smallest kind of damn who he is."

Timberley laid a heavy hand on his thin arm.

"Well, you're going to start caring right away. Just as soon as I speak his name to you, you are going to lie down on those pine needles and throw a nice little fit, that's what you're going to do."

Haight paused in the act of putting a lighted match to the little pile of dried branches he had placed in the open.

"What are you driving at?" he asked.

"Simply this," answered Timberley. "That little property you inherited four years or so ago, through lack of a closer heir, is really yours no longer."

The match in the other's fingers charred out, leaving a smarting blister. His cavernous eyes fixed Timberley's appealingly.

"You mean?" he questioned.

"That the real heir is alive, very much and actively alive, Bob," said his friend, "The real heir is the keeper and owner of Hardwoods Retreat, Francis Stanley, *alias* Dorkin."

## CHAPTER VIII

"Musko," called Timberley to the guide, "you'll find a fish-rod and fly-book beneath the bearskin in the stern of the canoe. Get them for me, like a good fellow." Then, turning to the man who sat hunched before the unkindled pile of wood, "Haight, I glimpsed a pretty little stream back along the shore a piece. Come along and we'll try for a trout. I want to have a little talk with you where the black flies are less persistent; the little beggars hang close to these bushes, and down yonder it seems more open."

He rubbed a swollen spot on his neck and reached for the canvas case which the Indian had brought. "You might kindle that funeral pyre yonder in about three quarters of an hour, Musko," he suggested, "and have the water boiling. And, Musko, make the tea strong, real strong. My nerves have had a severe shock. I crave for a strong and bitter draught, oh, noble red man."

"Umph," grunted the Indian, "me make um plenty strong, you bet."

"Right, brave warrior," encouraged Timberley. "Come along, Haight."

The two threaded their way through the thick-growing cedars in silence, save for an occasional muttered but significant something by Haight that

qualified the hungry black flies. At length above the swaying drone of the trees there arose a swishing murmur, and by and by there flashed into view a wide stream of tumbling water that bubbled and gleamed in the high sunlight.

"Is n't that beautiful, Haight?" cried Timberley, his face aglow. "Is n't that simply magnificent? 'Men may come and men may go, but I go on forever,'" he quoted, as he jointed his rod and selected a Silver Doctor from his fly-book.

Haight, standing moodily by, seemed to feel little of his friend's enthusiasm. The information which Timberley had so crisply handed him a little time back had, in a sense, robbed him of all appreciation of anything save the unpleasant position in which he was now placed. He sat down at the root of a lone pine and moodily nursed his sharp knees in his long arms.

Timberley laid his fly-book on the rock, rubbed his right hand free of moisture on his sleeve, then glanced at his companion. His lips parted in a sinister smile, but apparently he thought better of speaking what he had intended to say. He tiptoed softly to the edge of the stream and by a dexterous twist of the wrist sent the artificial fly far up against the white-maned stream.

Scarcely had it touched the water, close to the edge of a miniature eddy, than a big trout leaped for it. There was a dipping of the supple rod, a whizzing drone of the reel, and high in air, the water-

bubbles flashing from its rainbow sides like a shower of pearls, the gamest of all game fish leaped, to fall back again and dart upstream like an arrow shot from a bow.

Haight, leaning dejectedly against the tree, sat up with interest.

Once again the big fish leaped high above the rapid. Haight sprang to his long legs so swiftly that his hat fell off, leaving his bald head exposed to sun and flies. "By George," he cried excitedly, "he's a beauty, Tom, a beauty! Keep the tip of your rod down, you idiot."

Timberley shot him a look from the corners of his eyes. "You mind your own business, you antiquated fossil," he grunted. "Who's playing this trout of all trouts, anyway?"

"He's playing you, that's what he's doing," groaned the now fully awakened Haight. "Good Lord, man!" he shouted, "he's making for that sunken tree across the stream."

"He's making for that frying-pan of ours, that's where he's making," returned Timberley, "and, you poor living skeleton, I would thank you to keep that bass voice of yours under soft pedal. I don't want this fish shocked to death. I want to play him — play him," he repeated, giving the reel a snub, and laughing as the tired fish leaped again, gamely, but this time scarcely above the troubled surface of the stream.

Haight, his hands deep in his pockets, watched the

battle to its end. A big mosquito sat on the very tip of his sun-scorched nose, calmly drawing the life-fluid from that organ. The midday sun fell directly through a chink in the trees upon his bald head, but oblivious to it all, he was watching the fight. And Haight loved a fight.

Not until the kingly trout lay gasping on the moss did he move; then he turned, and with a sigh picked up his weather-stained hat. The big mosquito had committed suicide by sheer greediness, had in fact exploded by stretching his capacity beyond its endurance. A rapidly drying splash of gore, a smear of terra-cotta against the deeper red of sunburn, was all that was left to tell where one mosquito, at least, had fed unmolested, and died happy.

Haight resumed his seat again and watched Timberley unjoint his rod. "Are n't you going to try for another?" he asked.

"Nope," answered Timberley; "one's enough for a feed all round. That fellow weighs a good three pounds and a half, and I'm getting hungry as a marooned bear on a barren island. Besides, I want to talk to you, Bob, and we might as well get busy. What are you going to do about this fellow Dorkin?"

"I'm going to do whatever you advise, Tom. You're my lawyer, are n't you? I'm paying you for advice, ain't I?"

Timberley tied up his rod-case, slipped his fly-book in his hip pocket, and frowned. He came over

and stood before Haight, watched him as he extracted a pinch of brown stringy tobacco from a cotton pouch and placed it in one corner of his cavernous mouth, then said: —

"Francis Stanley and this man Dorkin are one and the same; no doubt of that. You, as his cousin, have enjoyed what is rightfully his for five years; no doubt of that either. He disappeared as effectively as though the earth had swallowed him up. The money and property left him by a deceased aunt reverted to you; the only thing it could do under the circumstances. I was glad to see it that way, I'll confess. I could always handle you, Bob, and I rather longed to handle your money. I've done so and you have n't lost anything, is n't that right?"

Haight nodded.

"Well, as you know, you've got some — a good deal — of that money tied up in investment. It's going to put you in a pretty box if this Dorkin finds out. Get me?"

Again Haight nodded. "Can he really do anything to me?" he inquired. "You claim that you advertised high and low for information concerning him?"

Timberley smiled. "My dear fellow, is it necessary for me to inform you that your lawyer, particularly if he is working for your best interests, is liable to tell you anything? No, Haight, I did n't advertise for the rightful heir. I'll be candid with you. I did n't think it at all necessary. He was a

dying man when — when he left the city. His own doctor told me that it was but a question of weeks, even days, before he caved in. He was soaked with morphine, a veritable wreck of a human being. By God, Haight, it would surely have killed a weaker man than he."

Timberley removed his hat and mopped his brow with his handkerchief.

"He did n't go under," he continued; "he came up here, and this place, this big woods with its glories, took hold of that remnant of a being and remade him, built him up into the finest specimen of manhood I have ever beheld. Haight, it's uncanny, but just the same it's wonderful and sublime. I'm no ranter, or raver, or nature-enthusiast, but I know when to take off my hat and bow down to some mightier force than myself. I'd hate to think I was not broad enough for that, Haight.

"And see here, there's no getting away from the fact that this big shagland holds a spell. Up here, a fellow gets thinking, gets reviewing little things, big things we would call them down there in the city, and it all makes him ashamed, yes, ashamed. You can't think certain thoughts up here, Haight, any more than you can use profanity in a cathedral where the stained lights fleck in and the pictured Madonna stands close to the wax crucifix, and the music drifts into you from the big organ. You can't do it and stick around. I've got to work fast to do what I must do, or I'll lose my nerve."

Haight munched his fine cut, his small blue eyes winking out at the sun-strewn mossland.

"You're a damned fool," he growled. "Now you just listen to me. You're a lawyer and, if one can believe what the papers say, a clever one. You've won some big cases. You're said to be hard, far-seeing, relentless, but you are slated for K.C. You come up here and get chuck full of a lot of rot, that's what you do. What you do is get back to where you feel more at home and do it quick. Get back there and get in harness. Incidentally a dose of calomel would n't hurt you any. Your liver is out of order, I reckon."

He shifted his eyes so as to meet Timberley's squarely. "What's the matter with you anyhow, Tom?"

"There's nothing the matter with me, Haight, absolutely nothing. I'm physically and mentally sound. Never was better, and that's a fact."

Haight looked at him searchingly. Then he got up and put a hand on his friend's shoulder.

"But you can't forget Edna Marsh," he asserted. "You're in love with her more than ever, are n't you?"

Timberley flushed beneath his tan. "Oh, damnation!" he cried, "why do you bring her into this thing?"

"I have a reason," said Haight quietly, — "a good reason. You're my friend, Timberley, a hanged good friend and always have been. You've played

square, and in spite of a lot of meannesses you possess, I like you better than anybody I know. I'm a queer devil and a crank along some lines. You possess a nature I would n't wish on a grizzly bear, but I like you a lot just the same. Trouble is, you will let your Indian disposition carry you away. You put this cousin of mine to the wall, and it would n't surprise me if you spoilt this world for him just as you did the other, because he did you an injury as you thought. As you like about that, but what I want to know is, what are you going to do to Edna Marsh for making you the laughing-stock of your friends, down yonder?"

A shiver ran through Timberley's tense form and his hands clenched and unclenched in a paroxysm of feeling.

"Haight," he said in ominous tones, "you'd better drop this subject. I won't stand for you speaking of her in this fashion. I won't stand for you speaking of her *at all*. Understand?"

Haight grinned. "Oh, yes, you will," he said gently, "and I'll tell you why. She is just as fond of you as you are of her. She broke off the engagement on account of some influence being brought to bear on her to make her believe that you were after her money."

"You're crazy."

"No, I'm speaking the truth," persisted Haight. "I happen to know — just how I happen to know does n't matter. What I want you to tell me now is, was it her money you wanted?"

He laughed and held up a thin hand as Timberley took a quick step towards him. "That's the answer, Tom," he said earnestly. "I simply wanted to get your old spirit back into you."

Timberley was silent. Finally he looked up and his face was a trifle pale as he said: "I love Edna Marsh better than anything, better than everything in the world. I would do anything big and grand, anything mean and despicable to win her."

Haight grinned his approval. "That's more like it," he said; "you're your own man again. Stay your own man. For Heaven's sake, keep those fool thoughts of what this big forest solitude can do out of your mind. You've got the name of being hard, of riding roughshod over all obstacles. Keep it, Tom. We came across here to talk over my little difficulty, and, by George, we're dealing with another case altogether. Funny, eh? Never mind, the Dever & Strads Shows can get their animals the best way they know how. I've already made up my mind what I'll do about the stuff I've wrongly inherited. Dorkin will get it when I get good and ready to give it to him, and not before. So we'll get down to your case. You want to marry Edna Marsh, don't you?"

Timberley looked at the speaker. "You know I desire it above all else," he said earnestly.

"And you want her to know beyond the shadow of a doubt that it is she — not her money, don't you?"

"Yes, she will have to know that."

Haight had reseated himself on the moss. Timberley stood before him.

"Haight," he said, "you're not a bad fellow at all. You're my friend; I like you and you know it. If I had n't liked you, I'm damned if I'd quit my practice to come up here on this wild-goose chase just to please you. Now tell me exactly what you're driving at."

"You needed the change, Tom," fenced the other. "You were pretty hard hit, and I knew it. A fellow feels a thing like that; he feels it."

Timberley shot him a look.

"Oh, I've been through it," said Haight grimly. "I know what it's like." He laughed oddly. "It's all right to give advice, Tom; to advise a man what to do or not to do after he has been thrown down by the one woman. It's a question which is the bigger fool, though, the man who gives advice or the man who listens to it.

"You see," he said, rubbing a blood-crusted ear gingerly, "falling in love is like getting bitten by a black fly. One does n't realize the pain of it until — some time later. When the burning smart comes — the fly is gone. There's always more or less suffering to be borne, I reckon. Some men can stand it better than others, though, just as some horses can stand flies better than others. You know horses well, and you know what a Clydesdale can stand would kill a horse of finer metal."

"You're right enough, but I fail to get the connection, Haight."

"Here it is, then. You're high-strung. You're suffering. You've been turned down; flatly, coldly turned down by the *only* woman. You are losing your grip on yourself, boy. You've got to buck up!"

Timberley turned away. "If that's all you've got to say, we'd better get back to camp," he informed his friend crisply.

Haight arose. "It's not all I've got to say," he cried, "not by a damned sight. I'm an old showman, Tom, and I know animals a damned sight better than I know human beings, but —"

He put a long finger on Timberley's shoulder. "I know something about a few people; yes, I know that you and Edna Marsh are two foolish human beings, head over heels in love with each other. I know that she has conceived the idea that you want her money, and I know that you are both too high-headed ever to come to an understanding by yourselves, and so —"

"And so," repeated Timberley, smiling, "and so what?"

"And so I step in and take a hand, Tom. That little woman is suffering just as much as you are, more than you are, likely. She has to fight against something you can't understand. Right now, if you could read her heart, she is wishing she did n't have a cent in the world."

"I wish to God she had n't," was wrung from the other man.

Haight blinked his small eyes and screwed up his face. "Well," he said impressively, "maybe she has n't, for the matter of that."

"Oh, don't talk foolish," cried Timberley. "She's got it, and that settles it; does n't it?"

Haight puckered his lips and whistled a bar or two of a tuneless dirge, thoughtfully. "Tom," he said looking across the lake, "I reckon you are too damned weak to deprive her of her money, even to make sure of winning her, is n't that right?"

"Haight," returned Timberley, his voice not quite steady, "there are bigger things than money. There's her happiness and mine. I believe I'm small enough to make her penniless if I could, if so doing would give her back to me; but, my boy, I'd make it up to her. Yes, I'd make it up to her."

He turned away to pick up his fish and rod, but Haight gripped his arm. "Tom," he said, "suppose it could be proven that she did n't own a cent in her own right, that there was another and closer heir to that fortune, what then?"

Timberley did not answer. His head settled low on his breast. Haight watched him meditatively, a look of strange tenderness in his eyes; watched him move slowly across and stand looking up the swift, boiling stream, through the low hanging trees.

Then he spoke again. "Tom, I reckon I'm becoming as bad an Indian as you are, and I'm going

to help you win through! And," he added, "to hell with everybody who tries to thwart us. Now, that's settled, I'm going back to camp."

He dived into the cedars and Timberley stood, still gazing across the wild, beautiful world. His back was towards the lake so that he did not see a canoe approach the shore, nor hear the footfall of the young girl paddler on the spongy moss. Not until she spoke did he become conscious of her presence. Then he turned quickly to meet Willow Farney's big grey eyes fixed on his face. Her brown hands were clenched on the stock of a small rifle. Timberley gave a gasp of surprise and admiration; then recovering himself, he bowed.

"I beg your pardon," he said, lifting his hat; "you spoke, did n't you? Sorry I did n't catch what you said, but the crash of the stream drowned your words. Please say it again, won't you?"

She gazed upon him calmly, deliberately, as though considering.

"You've got to get out of here," she informed him. "You've got to get out of here, quick."

Timberley's lips twisted into a sneering smile. "Well," he returned, "I guess I can do that, if it's your orders. Perhaps I am trespassing on your property, Miss?"

"No," she said, "t'ain't our property; it's a part of our trappin' grounds, but we ain't got no call to order anybody off of it. I'm simply tellin' you

somethin' fer your own good. You'd best go back to where you belong, an' you'd best go right soon."

"Why?" he asked absently, his dark eyes drinking in her strange, wild beauty.

She came a step closer and gazed upon him searchingly. "'Cause you ain't here fer no good," she said quickly. "You was up yonder on the Preserve a time ago. You made him sick, sick, — I found him layin' on his face among the trees. He was cryin' — cryin'," she repeated with a catch in her voice; "*him* cryin'! Godamighty, I've a good mind to snuff you out fer that. I've a good mind to do it."

She raised the rifle and Timberley instinctively recoiled. Then he faced her, a glow of admiration in his face. "He is your friend?" he asked.

She smiled at the question, and the man looked at her with a greatly growing wonder. Never before had he seen a smile transfigure a face as that smile transfigured hers. It reminded him of something he had seen when the first primitive wonders of this big solitude were forced home to him; a gleam of unleashed sunlight flashing upon a darkened aisle of the forest, an eddy between rocks glowing out through a splash of sunset colors.

"Oh, man," she said wistfully, "he's *everythin'* to me."

Timberley's eyes fell before the look in the girl's eyes. Something broke loose in his soul and surged throughout his being. He felt ashamed, strangely

out of place. When, at length, he looked up, the strained, set expression was back on her face.

"You'd best go away and leave him alone," she said. "He belongs up here. This place needs him."

Timberley attempted a careless laugh, but it was a failure. With those grave, steady eyes boring into his soul, he felt strangely subdued, cornered, out of his element. Something like anger stirred in his breast. Once, a half-grown lynx had crouched in the crotch of a tree above him and watched him just as this girl was watching him now, and, having no rifle with him, he had backed away. Now he felt like backing away again, just as he had on the other occasion; but his obstinacy, his dislike of being forced to act, held him to his ground.

"I think I'll stick around here for a while yet," he said easily; "I like these woods."

"You'd best not," she replied calmly. "You don't belong here."

"Belong?" he asked quickly. "What do you mean by belong?"

She shook her hair back from her face and swept the water-shot forest with her arm. Then she stooped and picked up the fish lying on the moss beside the stream.

"This trout belonged to that strong water," she said. "He lived in that white stream, fed in it with his nose against the current, bored his way through the rapids as easily as I toss him on the moss now. He *belonged* there."

"Yes," nodded Timberley perplexedly.

"Well, you don't find any of the quiet-water fish such as perch and blue-gills tryin' to live in that stream. Why?"

"I'm sure I don't know. Tell me."

"'Cause they know they could n't live there, that's why. The rapids would twist 'em and the rocks would rip 'em. They don't belong."

"Oh." Timberley put his hands in his pockets and looked down at the ground. "You mean," he said lamely, "that I am a misfit here; is that it?"

"I mean as the lake fish don't try that stream, that's all," she said grimly. "You'd best be goin' back to where you belong."

With the words she was gone; gone like a flash among the trees. Timberley waited until he saw the canoe shoot out on the lake and speed the blue-white span between the forests like a brown arrow.

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed. "What a girl, what a beautiful thing she was, with her big grey eyes and her mass of gleaming hair! And, great Scott, what a spirit she displayed!"

He stooped to pick up the fish she had cast back on the moss. He eyed it reflectively, then his eyes followed the pale wake which the canoe had left on the lake's surface, until they caught a faint speck vanishing about a distant bend of the shore. "She was perfect," he murmured, "perfect. Like this big trout, like this big wilderness, — absolutely perfect. And, by God, she was right, I don't belong!"

# CHAPTER IX

MR. DAYTON sat at the dinner-table, a thoughtful expression on his aristocratic face, the tips of his slender fingers pressed together, as from the corner of his eyes he watched his niece pass absent-mindedly from the room, her portfolio and easel under her arm.

Ma Washburn, catching the smile that flickered across the banker's thin lips, thought: "My, it's lovely to see the way he worships that sweet girl!"

"Don't you care none to smoke arter meals?" inquired Pa Washburn of his guest, as he filled his pipe for the second time.

Mr. Dayton shrugged his shoulders.

"My dear sir," he replied, "my nerves will not permit of it; and even if they did," he added, with a grimace, "I should not smoke. I consider it a filthy habit."

"Some do," replied Washburn coolly, as he applied a match to the mouth of the blackened bowl.

Mr. Dayton rose and walked slowly towards the door, coughing significantly as he groped through the blue smoke that blocked his passage.

"Is this country adaptable to agriculture?" he asked his host who had followed him outside.

"Wall, yes," Washburn replied. "We raise potatoes an' sech garden stuff as we need, but that

seems about all we find time to look arter. Some day, though, this country is goin' to be a big farmin' country, you can bet on that."

"It's pretty rocky," said Mr. Dayton dubiously. "I don't suppose anybody ever discovered any mineral deposits up here, silver or gold?" he asked with interest.

Mr. Washburn shook his head. "Not to my knowledge," he returned. "I guess Ma's silver teapot an' the gold fillin' in MacDonald's teeth is about all the minerals deposited up here in these parts; an'," with a grin, "knowin' the two properties as I do, I'll be everlastin' whip-sawed if I'd like to go prospectin' on their claims. No," he added, growing serious, "there ain't no precious minerals or any minerals up here as I've noticed, though I'm not sayin' the stuff ain't here. I will say, though, that we've got a mighty fine country fer stock-raisin'—Gosh all hemlock, I should say we have! Look down in that valley. How's that fer a spring catch o' grass, eh?"

"It looks fine," nodded Mr. Dayton. "Sheep would do well up here, I should say."

Washburn gave a grunt of disdain. "Sheep, nuthin'," he retorted. "Why, Mister, sheep 'ud stand about as much show up here as a pack-rat among a bunch of huskies. The wolves 'ud snatch 'em up quicker 'n anythin'. No, this here country ain't no good fer sheep, an' it ain't good fer goats either, 'cause I tried 'em."

Mr. Dayton smiled at the expression of disgust on the man's face.

"And it did n't work, eh?"

"Work? no, siree, it did n't! Why, do you know I lost more money in less time raisin' goats than I 've lost all other ways put together, an' I can't say as I 've been what you 'd call a successful speculator either.

"Tell you what I did. I got two pairs of goats shipped in here to start with, two Nanny-goats an' two Billies. The Nanny-goats were well-mannered an' quiet as pictures, but the Billies were simply awful. They started in cleanin' up on my garden stuff, an' they et everythin' they walked on but the rocks, an' they even tried to eat them; you can see their teeth marks on 'em yet. I stood it fer a while, 'cause I had bragged to Ma what we was goin' to make outen them goats, an' as I had brought 'em fair an' square against her advice, I stood em!

"Now, there's two things a Billy-goat kin do an' do well. One is eat the face of the world down to the bone, an' the other is pollute the atmosphere to sech an extent that a tannery 'ud smell like apple-blossoms, in comparison. I ain't exaggeratin' none when I tell you that with a fair wind you could smell them Billy-goats clean to the railway station.

"Bill Stover, the agent, says so, and Bill ain't got much of a nose either havin' half on it friz off in a blizzard six years ago."

Mr. Washburn paused to relight his pipe; then he resumed.

"However, I stood the grazin', an' I stood the smells, an' I'd have stood a lot of other things rather than own myself beat, if them Billies had n't took an unreasonable dislike to me an' tried to wipe me off this Gawd's free soil. Fust hint I had that they had made up their minds to do fer me was one night when I was beachin' my canoe down on the shore yonder. I'd pulled the boat up an' was leanin' over to get a skin rug, when, *biff!* Somethin' like a runaway locomotive hit me, an' I went sprawlin', a dozen yards away. Fust off, I reckoned that Old Creation Hills, yonder, must have slipped their moorin's an' I was the victim of a landslide; but afore I could find out fer certain just what had happened to me, I got a biff from another quarter that shot me clean under the canoe. From the density of the atmosphere I conjectured that one er both of them goats had seen fit to act a little playish with me, so I lay still. I lay still, an' dang me if them goats did n't butt that canoe all to splinters. I had to jump inter the lake an' swim fer it, an' when I got 'round Scragg p'int, yonder, I climbed up on shore an' made fer the cabin.

"When I was loadin' the rifle, I heard a yelp, an' I looked out to see a big white dog — I don't know what breed he was, but a man had sent him to me to sled-break fer him — makin' fer the tall timber. Them two Billies were right on his track, an' makin' things warm fer him. I follered up, an' I will say *I did good shootin'*. Them Billy-goats came back never more."

"And the dog?" inquired the banker.

Washburn shook his head and turned towards the mill, a short distance away.

"He never came back either. I've sorter thought as maybe he mated up with some fool wolf; they'll do that sometimes. Well, see you at supper, got to go down to the yard."

Mr. Dayton waited until the settler disappeared from view, then glancing furtively about him, he sought the valley path leading in the opposite direction.

It was late afternoon, when Edna, seated beneath a spreading tree, putting the last touches on a water-color sketch, saw him returning up the path to the cabin. He looked very frail, very weary.

She dropped her sketch and ran forward to meet him on the path.

"Uncle, dear," she cried reproachfully, "you are overdoing it. Your face is positively haggard from fatigue. And your hands are hot," she chided, as she stroked them tenderly. "Come, you must, sit here on this mossy knoll and rest a bit before finishing the climb to the house."

She drew him over to the tiny glade, and he sank wearily down beside her on the sward. "Edna, my dear child," he said, speaking with difficulty, "I have had a distinct shock; the reaction has left me weak."

He inserted a blue-veined, trembling hand into the pocket of his coat and drew out a silk handker-

chief. He wiped his brow gently and, raising the handkerchief to his eyes, held it so. She saw a shiver run down his frail form, and her cool hands tightened in sympathy upon his.

"Timberley is here, Edna," he said in a whisper. "I met him on the trail, this afternoon."

The girl gave a gasp. The color fled from her face. "Are you sure?" she asked in a strained voice. "Oh, surely he is not so vile as to follow me up here with his persecutions. He is contemptible enough, God knows, but —" Her voice trailed off in a quaver and she hid her face in her hands.

"I too gave him credit for possessing a little manhood," sighed Mr. Dayton. "In a measure, at least, I looked for him to respect our wishes. For him to follow us here, when we came solely, you might say, to get away from him, is cowardly."

"Yes," she agreed, "it is cowardly. Did you speak to him, Uncle?"

"I would have passed him by without recognition, if that had been possible," he answered, "but he planted himself directly in my path. I will not repeat the things he said to me, Edna. They were anything but pleasant."

"Oh!" she cried. "For him to dare to abuse you!" She lifted her head, her deep eyes flashing.

Again her guardian shivered. "Edna, dear," he said brokenly. "He did more than abuse me in words. He struck me."

She was silent. But he felt her form grow tense.

"It was not a heavy blow," he said quickly. "It hurt me very little. Even now, Edna, I bear him no malice, and would willingly forget and forgive, for your sake, knowing that you once loved him and, perhaps, still cherish more than a passing regard for him, had he not by his words and actions, to-day, proved to me beyond a doubt that he is as great a knave as I suspected."

"I wish never to see him again," whispered the girl; "and to think I loved him once, yes; but now I hate and despise him. Oh, Uncle," she choked, throwing her arms about his neck, "how good you have been to me, and, oh, dear," she sobbed, "think of the misery your vigilance and love have saved me from."

"There, there," he soothed, his own voice husky. "You must n't think of that, girlie. Think only of the great happiness and comfort you have been to me through eighteen years of life, Edna. I would, indeed, have been a traitor to have proven false to the tender trust imposed in me by the niece of the best friend a man ever had."

"Uncle," said the girl quickly, "was n't it in some body of water far up in this Northern country that Uncle Graydon and his bride of a year lost their lives?"

"Yes, dear," the banker answered, — "eighteen years ago, during a tempest. The river in which they lost their lives, through the capsizing of their boat, was somewhere in the vicinity of the place called, by

the Indians, Basin of White Water. As I have told you before, your uncle was a true artist, and the wealth he had inherited allowed of his indulging his art as much as he wished. The forest primeval had always appealed to his fancy. It was in quest of subjects of this nature that he, in company with your aunt, had journeyed up in the Northern limits of this big solitude.

"Your uncle, who was something of a fatalist, had, it seemed, a premonition that he might never return. Before leaving he made his will and named me guardian of the three-year-old girlie they were leaving behind in my wife's care. That little girl was you, Edna. You were five years old when my dear wife, your foster-mother, passed away. I have tried to be both father and mother to you, ever since, dear. Sometimes —" He hesitated, and looked into the girl's face. "Sometimes, I feel that I have succeeded but indifferently well."

"No, no," she protested. "You could have been no more to me than you have, Uncle."

"I have tried to protect you and your interests to the best of my poor ability," he murmured. "The fortune left you by your Uncle Graydon, and which I was to invest for you as I thought best —"

She caught his hand and pressed it. "Uncle, dear," she begged. "You remember, you promised me not to mention that again. I am satisfied, more than satisfied, with what you have done with my money. Believe me, I do not care to know what

it is. Some day you may tell me, if you wish; but now, now we have each other," she cried chokingly, "and we have this wonderful wild world, with its scents, colors, and silence. Let us enjoy it all, Uncle. Let us forget that — that man. He can do us no harm."

"Yes, yes," the old man sighed, as she placed her hand under his arm and assisted him to rise. "We will forget Timberley, girlie. As you say, he can do us no harm. But he will try, Edna; no doubt of that."

The mellow call of a woman's voice came from the glade above.

"That's Ma Washburn calling us to supper, Uncle. Come."

The girl's face was still pale, but her eyes mirrored a new purpose as her arm went about her uncle's narrow shoulders, and she led him up the path to the house.

The Washburns had carried the dining-table out into the cedar grove. Mr. Washburn hailed them as they came in sight.

"Hurry up!" he shouted. "Ma's creamed chicken won't last long when I get squared away to it."

"I've jest had an awful time keepin' that hungry man from settin' in and eatin', afore you come," cried Ma Washburn. "Pa's manners are gettin' worse, through minglin' with that mill crowd; they are so."

She bustled about arranging the chairs and placing all manner of good things on the table.

"I saw a feller from the Basin of White Water, this arternoon," said Pa Washburn as he passed the plates. "That's the place where the Algonquin Injuns live," he explained. "They've got a village of their own there.

"Wall, this feller, he was a-tellin' me that there's a man by the name of Savage come down to these parts. I understan' this Savage is a pretty bad character, if what one hears is true. Anyways, he's been mixed up in trouble in these parts before, an' will likely be again. I'll bet a raisin cookie that him an' Abe Dalton are shapin' some deviltry together."

Mr. Dayton knit his brows. "Trouble of what nature, may I ask?" he inquired.

"Why, 'most any kind, so long's it promises some excitement an' some gain ter him," answered the settler. "One thing sure is, him an' the company behind him are down on game preserves of all kinds. He's somethin' of a fur-dealer, ye see, an' every protected animal is one less fer his traps."

Mr. Dayton glanced at his niece. She flashed him an appealing look.

"I believe that I have some information which will interest you, Mr. Washburn, particularly as you are a friend of Mr. Dorkin's," he said.

Immediately Washburn was all attention.

"Wall, you've said it there," he replied. "Anythin' concernin' Dorkin concerns me too; jest what is it, might I ask?"

"This afternoon," said Mr. Dayton, "I learned

that there is another man, lately arrived here, who contemplates Mr. Dorkin harm, in some way. His name is Timberley. He is from my city. We are not" — he cleared his throat — "friends," he finished.

"Do tell!" exclaimed Mrs. Washburn.

"Yes?" scowled the settler; "and what happened?"

"Nothing, outside of — a — hem — a personal nature, sir," returned the banker, with dignity, "with the exception of a threat he made against Dorkin, while allowing his anger to master his discretion. He told me that he intended to drive your friend from the forest."

Washburn combed his goatee vigorously. "The danged cuss!" he exploded; and quite ignoring his good wife's reproachful "Pa Washburn, you must n't swear," he supplemented that with "The tarnation sneakin' skunk!"

Mr. Dayton smiled faintly and Mrs. Washburn turned apologetically to Edna. "Pa's all wrought up," she excused him. "He's very fond of Dorkin, Miss."

Pa Washburn turned his troubled blue eyes upon the girl. "You must n't mind me, Miss," he said, his face bespeaking contrition. "I'm very liable to fly offen the handle, that there way. I'm right sorry if I shocked you."

Edna forced a smile. "I am not shocked," she said quietly. "In fact I was thinking, and did not

catch what you said, Mr. Washburn. But whatever it was," she added, a catch in her voice, "I am sure that man deserves it." She excused herself and left the table.

Ma Washburn sighed. "Well, it seems too bad this thing happened, if it's goin' to spoil your holiday, Mr. Dayton. We don't often have trouble up in these parts, do we, Pa?"

"Not often," returned her husband. "But when it does come, it comes right. I guess maybe we'd better tell Dorkin," he suggested, turning to the banker.

"Perhaps it would be as well," agreed that gentleman.

Ma Washburn, remarking that something needed attention in the kitchen, beamed her excuse and followed in the wake of Edna.

Washburn looked after her, a tender smile on his face.

"She's seen trouble in that leetle gal's eyes," he explained to the other's look. "And Ma's great on chasin' trouble away from hearts. When I first got that woman," he went on, "I worried 'most all the time. She was kept busy talkin' me out of it, an' when I think back on it, I know right well she had some work to do. But she's got me down to the p'int when I only get up an' paw the air — like you see me jest now — occasionally. What I'd ever do without her, I don't know."

"She certainly is a splendid woman," agreed Mr. Dayton.

Washburn felt for his pipe. "Best wife in the world, bar none," he said proudly.

He lit his pipe and sat back, his brows screwed up in thought.

"I do hope that Dalton gang and Savage don't start anythin'," he said anxiously. "But I'm afraid — I'm afraid they will. Do you reckon this man — Timberley — do you reckon he's playin' along with Dalton, sir?"

"It's quite possible; in fact very probable," replied the banker. "From what he let fall to me this afternoon, I might say that he is, without doubt, standing in with the outlaw trappers."

"Gosh all hemlock!" exclaimed the settler. "Things don't look none too good fer Dorkin. I guess maybe we best go up to the Preserve right soon, sir. If you don't mind, you kin tell him what that chap Timberley said."

"I shall be glad to be of any service to your friend, Mr. Washburn."

Mr. Dayton arose from the table and with a short nod to his host moved towards the cabin.

"Gosh, but he's thin and white and shaky," mused the settler, gazing after him. "I'm thinkin' it's because that sweet leetle gal needs him so much that he's stayin' alive."

## CHAPTER X

HAIGHT, coming, hot and perspiring, up the trail from the lake, found Timberley reclining lazily in a hammock, swung between two poplars, dreamily studying the cloud-flecked sky through the trees. He paused abruptly and his mouth fell open in an exclamation of wonder.

"How in Sam Hill did you get here before me?" he asked, as Timberley turned his head towards him.

"Why, I've never left here, Haight. Been right in this spot, all afternoon."

Haight kicked an empty tomato-can into the shrubs, with an oath of disgust. "Say, I'm sick of this new rôle you're playing, Tom," he said shortly. "You must think I'm a fool, and no mistake. Every time I've seen you prowling around in the woods, you've up and denied it. What's the answer?"

Timberley slowly drew up his feet and swung to a sitting position. "I tell you," he said shortly, "I have n't been out in the woods to-day — and," he added, "that goes."

"Oh, all right, have it your own way," grumbled Haight, "but I'm damned if I can understand your secrecy, that's all."

"It's my opinion," sneered Timberley, "you've

had a touch of sun, or something like it. Why the devil would I want to deny anything as harmless as *prowling* out in the woods, as you put it?"

Haight came over and stood before his friend. His long, sour face was troubled. Noting it, Timberley laughed. "Poor old Haight," he said consolingly, "this big, wild world seems to be getting him too. And what was I doing this afternoon to so trouble you?" he asked.

"Well —" Haight took a chew of fine-cut and seated himself on a block opposite his friend. "You were hob-nobbing with that fellow, Abe Dalton, as usual. Had your heads mighty close together, — ah, you need n't deny it, Tom," — as Timberley frowned and shook his head, — "I saw you plain. Who else, up in this place, wears a grey tweed suit and Stetson hat? More than that," he insisted, "Musko saw you, too. Here he is now," as the Indian came into view carrying paddle and fish-rod. "Hey, Musko," he called, "did n't we see Timberley, here, talking to Abe Dalton down along the Tamarack Swamp, not five minutes ago?"

The Indian came stolidly forward, and paused between the two.

"Me no understand," he grunted.

"You'll have to appeal more directly to his primitive intelligence, Haight," sneered Timberley. "Here, let me try. Musko," he said sternly, "you did n't see me talking to anybody, down in the Swamp, did you?"

The Cree flashed a look from one to the other of his interrogators. "No," he said gutturally; then, as if fearing he had not given his negative sufficient force, he added, "Not by damn sight."

Timberley lay back in his hammock and laughed at Haight's discomfiture. "See, my poor deluded man of many fancies," he mocked, "the noble red man testifies against your saneness. Upon my word, Haight, mosquitoes, tobacco, and grieving over possible loss of your inheritance seem to have unseated your reason a trifle."

Haight frowned vindictively at the Indian, now busy kindling a fire. "You've got him hypnotized, same as you have me and everybody else," he growled. "He'd swear black was white for you, and you know it. However," he added airily, "it's nothing to me. Keep right on, Tommie, my boy; have your secret meetings with the bush outlaw, or do anything else your warped nature prompts. There was a time, though, when you took old Haight into your confidence a little, and it's barely possible a time will come again, soon, when you'll wish you had let me in on this little play. Well, it's your own funeral, and I'm not worrying. Of course," he added, with a short laugh, "it's easy to guess the lay-out."

Timberley's smile vanished; a frown grew up between his brows.

"You mean, I owe that man Dorkin something, and intend to pay?" he said.

"That's it, Tom."

Timberley flung himself from the hammock and produced a cigar-case from his pocket. He nipped off the end of a cigar and lit it, his eyes levelled on Haight's. His face had grown serious, his jaw obtruded aggressively.

"Haight," he said earnestly, "there's one big truth which the world *we* know, that world with its rushing, pushing, grovelling atoms, has attempted to ignore in the making of its laws. That truth is, *Everybody pays, some day.* But up here, in a world standing to-day just as God made it, a world as yet unspoiled by Man's striving to put the finishing touches on what he considers God has done His best with — that law stands out so that a child might read it."

He sank on a block opposite to where Haight was seated, sullenly munching his tobacco, and laid his hand on one of his friend's thin knees.

"When I was a boy," he continued softly, "I used to read over and over one of the lessons in the old school-reader. It was called 'The Last Link in the Chain of Destruction.' I was, perhaps, the more interested in it because I did n't understand it. We are all that way, I guess. Well, anyway, I used to read that lesson and ponder over it. It contained the very first intimation I ever received that everything must pay. Here it is in brief. A spider catches and kills a fly by driving its lance into the other insect's head. A lizard pounces on the spider — and

the spider pays. A tree-snake makes a meal of the lizard; receipt in full for Mr. Lizard. A hawk kills the snake; an eagle kills the hawk; and a man with a gun kills the eagle. Unfortunately, the writer does not enlighten us as to how the last link — the man — paid his debt. Undoubtedly, though, he was struck by lightning, was drowned, or punished in some way by the Great Destroyer, but one link removed from him."

He paused, his eyes on Haight's long face. Haight squirmed uneasily.

"By Great Destroyer, you mean God, I take it?" he questioned.

"God, or whatever that Higher Power may be, whose law is an 'Eye for an eye'; yes."

Haight stood up. "Rot," he fumed, — "all danged rot. Whoever heard of such a law? Bosh! I tell you this world is full of smooth sharks who steal and do all sorts of shady things — even murder — and get away with it."

"No, they don't." Timberley's tones were crisp. "They pay — *some time.* Any day you care to, — providing you know how, — you may see that story I have just cited enacted here in this forest, Haight. Everything pays, some time, I tell you; everything."

Haight rose and turned towards the tent. "Of course I know that you owe Dorkin a grudge, and that you're Injun enough to pay in full," he said quietly; "but," he added scathingly, "I never knew

before that you had a streak of yellow that would get between you and your purpose and make you grope for a motive."

Timberley reached out and gripped Haight's thin arm in fingers of steel. "Haight," he said sombrely, "you're sick, fanciful; otherwise, I would put you across my knee and spank you good."

Haight turned fiercely upon his friend; then gradually the anger melted from his eyes; the long face became transfigured by a smile. Timberley caught a suspicion of moisture in the blue eyes now appealing to him.

"Haight," he said gently, "there's nothing I can tell you. Come, Musko has dinner ready, and I'm hungry as a hunter."

They ate dinner in silence. Even the Indian, who usually had some plan for canoe trip or sojourn to some noted trout streams to lay before his patrons, was quiet throughout the meal. Fragrant bacon and crisp trout, their vermilion spots still showing dully along their sides, disappeared quickly. Dinner over, Timberley, without so much as a word, caught up his hat, picked up rod and fly-book and turned towards the trail. Haight watched him from the corners of his eyes. "It's sure hell to be turned down by the one girl," he thought. "It's certainly working ructions with poor old Tom."

Half an hour later he came upon Timberley seated on a log, in a little glade overlooking a tumbling stream. His elbows were on his knees, and he was

nursing his chin in his hands. Haight stepped on a dry twig and Timberley swung quickly about. "Oh," he said relievedly, "it's you?"

"Tom," said Haight, coming forward, "I've been thinking things over, and something tells me you ought to go back to the city."

Timberley was silent.

"There's your work — you know," insisted Haight, "and — and it don't seem that you've been able to get away from what you wanted to leave behind — does it?"

Timberley threw out his arms in a gesture of helplessness. "Fate seems to be stacking the cards, Haight," he laughed shortly, "but I guess I'm too much of a gambler to quit a game in which everything worth while is staked. And, by God, it takes a crook to plan a system to beat a crooked game. Is n't that right?"

"That's what I'm afraid of Tom. You're going to do something you'll regret all your life."

"No, I've already done that. What I'm going to do, I don't just know, definitely. But you can discard that notion of my going back to the city, because I'm not going. I'm going to stick with the big show."

"Hell." Haight breathed the oath fervently, but in his eyes was the glow of admiration he had always felt for Timberley as a fighter and a rough-shod rider over all conflicting obstacles to his ambitions.

With a shrug, he turned back toward the trail; then

he paused and said hesitatingly: "I'm leaving tomorrow for a point way up North, Tom. I can't tell you why I'm going, not yet; but you'll know some day, soon — if I have luck. Oh," as Timberley looked up concernedly, — "it'll be safe going. I've got that half-breed, Darbo, for guide, and he knows the woods like a book. He knows also what I'm after, and where to get it. I can't say just how long I'll be gone, but you can stay right here with Musko, providing you won't go back to the city, and you'll be all right."

He paused, waiting for Timberley to storm an objection to his going off and leaving him alone with an Indian for company. But Timberley had resumed his former position, elbows on knees, chin in hands.

All he said was: "All right, Haight. See you tonight," and Haight sought the trail, grumbling.

For a long time Timberley sat in deep thought. Then he sighed and picking up rod and creel made his way to the stream. He stood, watching the sunlight paint the tumbling water, slanting through the trees like a gleaming hand which seemed clutching at the swirling current with golden fingers. He smiled, as he watched it. That current was Destiny, those clutching fingers were mere atoms, who, like himself, were striving to sway it. Well, they could n't do it. They might as well go with the current.

A narrow trail ran parallel with the stream. Aimlessly Timberley started to follow it. Perhaps it

would lead to a larger stream, deeper water which would offer bigger trout.

For nearly an hour he followed the trail which gradually dipped deeper into the heavy forest. Here the lights rested on moss and fern, mellow and golden tinted. Dull and subdued, day groped through the far-reaching aisles of this the silent sanctuary of the forest, an alien seeking freedom, yet lingering as though loath to creep beyond the wonders here disclosed.

And all the glad, sweet scents of the world seemed lingering in those darkened corridors; rose, jasmine, heliotrope, odors of myrrh and rare sweet scents of orchid. Subtle, illusive, like the Spirit of the Solitude to which they belonged, they formed the incense of God's great cathedral.

Deeper grew the shadows, as the forest became denser; and now, far ahead, grew up the rumble of deep, "strong water."

A little later Timberley heard the gnash and snarl of the rapid, distinctly. The forest lightened and all about welled up the murmur of the wild things; the chatter of squirrels, the notes of nesting wood-birds.

A glade, broad and verdant green, spread out before him, as he emerged from the trees. At its foot a wide stream flashed and shouted, as it dashed between jagged rocks and threw showers of spray upon the wild flowers lifting from its mossy shore.

Timberley caught his breath, as he gazed. Here was a picture his soul could grasp and understand;

something strong, vivid, pulsating; something gloriously unfettered, that touched a chord deep within him and made his pulses leap.

His eyes wandered beyond the stream to a sloping tableland gemmed with tiny groves of fir and cedar; beyond these to a blue lake sleeping beneath a sky of swimming topaz. The white cabins in the clearing, he knew, must be those of Lookup Settlement; those lifting hills, beyond, must be Old Creation Hills.

A finger of forest ran out for perhaps fifty yards into the valley. Timberley wanted the view from its other side. There he could secure the full sweep of the wonderful panorama. He cut through the slender neck of trees and stepped out on the farther side.

Then he turned quickly as though to dive back into the forest again. But it was too late. The girl, seated before the easel, had seen him.

Gravely he lifted his hat and stood, waiting for her to speak. She had risen and the flush which had surged to her face at his intrusion had passed, leaving it deathly pale.

Without so much as a glance at him, beyond that first haughty and disdainful look, she picked up her easel and camp-stool and moved swiftly across the sward to the valley.

Timberley, head still uncovered, watched her until the poplars hid her, then he smiled bitterly. After a time he shook himself and walked slowly down to the stream.

As he stood gazing at the swirling water, his thoughts bitter as wormwood, a slow, revolving eddy at the foot of an obtruding rock broke suddenly, and a big trout leaped, painting a rainbow above the foam. At a time other than this, Timberley's heart would have gladdened at such a sight, and quickly would he have tied a fly in anticipation of a fight with such a monarch of the swift water. Now, he allowed the challenge to go unaccepted.

Slowly he turned to retrace his steps to the forest, then stood frowning. A man, or rather a boy almost man grown, stood directly in his path. He was dressed in doe-skin shirt and leggings, and carried a rifle. He looked straight at Timberley from dark, fearless eyes.

Ordinarily Timberley might have treated such apparent hostility, as the bush-lad's attitude displayed, with easy tolerance or contempt; but just at this particular time he was in no mood for it.

He checked the words which the other's undisguised animosity prompted, the dull red of anger dyeing his face and neck as he said, slowly, "I presume you are acting bodyguard to the young lady whom it was my misfortune to frighten away, a few minutes ago?"

"If you mean by that, was I watchin' over her like, I kin tell you that I was. Only, she did n't know it."

"Oh," Timberley's lips twisted in a sneer. "The young lady is fortunate, I am sure. Well," he flared,

losing control of himself before the cold, insolent eyes searching his face, "what the devil are you dogging me for?"

"I was wantin' bad to have a word or two with you," said the boy. "I've got somethin' here belongin' to you, Mr. Timberley. I found this tacked to one of the trees in Dorkin's Preserve. I did n't say anything to Dorkin."

He produced a white business card bearing Timberley's name and street address, and flung it at the man's feet.

Timberley bent and scrutinized the card, but did not pick it up. Then he straightened himself and folded his arms. "I don't suppose there is any use of my saying that I know nothing about this?" he said with a shrug; "you seem to be pretty certain of your ground."

"I am," the boy answered. "I saw you tack it to the tree. I could have put a bullet through your wrist, but I ain't carin' to hurt you that way — unless I have to."

"Oh." Timberley laughed shortly and caught up his rod and creel. "Well, is that all?"

"No, not quite. I want to tell you that the next time you're seen in the Preserve, you'll get plugged sure as hell; an' that goes. An'," he added, "that holds good with any of the Dalton gang, too. I'm not sayin' anythin' about what they are tryin' to do to get me, understan' — They're tryin' to get my grounds since Dad was killed, but that's my own

little affair an' theirs, an' I'll pay in my own way. But when it comes to you an' them tryin' to do fer the work an' the life of the biggest man Gawd ever made, that's some different. When you see Dalton, you jest tell him that Danny Farney said that. If Abe Dalton wants a fight, he's goin' to get it." And with this parting injunction the boy dipped among the poplars, and was gone.

# CHAPTER XI

NIGHT comes quickly in those vast forest-spaces when the gleaming shuttle of day, having woven its woof, drops from the canopy behind the jagged sky-line. And with its going comes the pall, and the quiet of death, until ghost-lights dance up across the Northern vista and the big stars swim out to hang low above the wilderness.

Up and above the spiky firs those stars were swimming now, close down, peering like great eyes deep into the silent vastness, as though striving to probe its mysteries.

Just outside the open doorway of a small cabin, in the edge of a grove of cedars, a slender, swarthy-faced half-breed sat smoking before a smouldering mosquito smudge.

Beside him, on a huge hemlock block, a candle burned clearly. His grimy hands fumbled a greasy deck of cards. At his feet crouched a pair of shaggy huskies, their hungry eyes blinking up into his face. Finishing the game of solitaire, he threw down the cards, and reaching for a jug standing on the rough table, he took a long drink of its fiery contents; then he placed the jug on the floor and threw another handful of chips on the smudge.

The larger of the two dogs yawned and stretched

himself erect, and as the man settled once more on the seat, he too sank back beside his fellow, his unblinking orbs still on his master's face.

The half-breed refilled his pipe, lit it, and rising, went into the cabin, returning almost immediately with a number of rusty steel traps which he threw on the ground before him. These he proceeded to rub with moose-tallow, pausing in his task, occasionally, to bend his head forward in a listening attitude.

As he worked a frown grew on his dark face and settled sullenly between his narrow eyes, and his thin lips drew into a straight line. Apparently his thoughts were not pleasant ones, for every now and again he muttered something low, in French, and bit hard on the stem of his pipe.

The dogs watched him furtively, uneasily. As he threw the last trap from him and rose, they too stood up and slunk a little away from him.

Suddenly upon the still air sounded the fluted call of a night hawk. The man paused in the act of lifting the candle from the block, and listened. Again the call sounded, and this time the trapper sent forth a soft call in answer.

A moment or two later another man slipped from the shadow of the forest into the candle-light, and stood in the doorway. He was a big man dressed in the garb of a trapper. His face was bestial and repulsive, but the wide-set eyes and high brow bespoke intelligence and power to command.

Back in the darkness the huskies crouched, growling, their wolf eyes cutting the blackness like points of emerald light.

"Where is he?" asked the big man shortly, ignoring the half-breed's smile of welcome and partly outstretched hand.

"He is no come yet; he come pretty soon, I guess so," returned the trapper. "Sacré," he added, "but you some tired I guess, an' hongrie, I bet, eh? Come in, Abe Dalton, an' I get supper for you, queek."

"I've had a devil of a time getting here, Darbo," said the visitor, allowing a shade of amiability to creep into his voice. "The very devil of a time. Snagged my canoe in Quill Rapids, and had to trek the rest of the way. Have n't had a bite to eat since noon, so hurry up and rustle something for me."

He sank down on a bench and stretched his legs out with a sigh of weariness.

The trapper, with a quick glance at the huge form, hastily lit another candle in the cabin's interior, and kicking the fire in a grate to life, lifted down a side of bacon from the wall and proceeded to pare long thin slices from it into a spacious frying-pan. This, along with a small iron kettle, he placed on the crackling fire; then he glanced again at his visitor, who had followed him inside. He wanted to ask a question, but one look at the big man's face was sufficient to make him hold it in check. That level, concentrated gaze of the man seated beside the table, however, forced him to say something.

"Dat bad place, Quill Rapid," he shrugged. "I one tam see two ranger drown dere. You have big tussle, I guess so?"

Dalton nodded. "It was a close call, but I've had closer," he replied with a grim laugh. "Have you ever tried to shoot Hell's Rapids, near the Basin of White Water?" he asked significantly.

The half-breed started, and the pan which he was lifting from the stove dropped back with a clatter.

"Sacré Mojie," he muttered, shuddering back and leaning against the wall.

The dogs leaped to their feet with low growls. Dalton glanced up quickly, and a sardonic smile flickered across his face.

"You clumsy fool!" he grated. "What's the matter?"

"Dat grease she fly up in my face, she burn lak hell," gulped the trapper. "It's all right, I get supper ready lak flash."

"Well, see that you do; but don't get nervous over nothing again. Funny I can't inquire if you have ever tried to shoot Hell's Rapids without your going all to pieces, Darbo."

The half-breed wheeled toward the speaker, his dark face livid and working. "I nevair shoot Hell Rapid, me," he denied. "Don't you make mistak' dere, Monsieur Dalton!"

"I did n't say you shot it," returned the other, "I asked you if you had *tried* to shoot it. There now, don't get peevish and attempt to deny it. You see,

I happen to know that you did try it — quite a long time ago, you and your Indian half-brother, White Hawk, eighteen years ago, say. You would be about nineteen or twenty years old then, I should judge. How do I know? Oh, never mind that. I just happen to know, that's all."

The trapper wiped his streaming face on his sleeve and opened his mouth as though to speak, but the big man held up his hand.

"Enough of this," he said sharply. "Now, then, answer my one question, and then I'll get busy with my supper. Why is n't *he* here? Did you send him word?"

"Sure t'ing. I send him word by Joe Delosh dis morning."

"And are you sure he got it?"

The half-breed turned his shifting eyes on his questioner. "I don't know dat, but I t'ink he get it all right. You know Joe Delosh?"

Dalton stood up and stretched his long arms. "Well, yes, Joe has never failed us yet, but that is n't anything to boast of. After all, Delosh is only an Injun, and God never made an honest Injun."

The half-breed lit his pipe. The insult to his Indian blood seared deep through his arteries, but no sign of it showed in the face that turned now towards the alert pair of huskies crouched in the doorway.

"Your supper is ready, Abe Dalton," he said quietly.

Dalton shoved the tin plate and cup across the board and carried his stool to the opposite side of the table.

"Somehow I'd rather face you than sit with my back to you," he laughed. "Funny how one takes little fancies like these, eh?"

The half-breed shrugged his shoulders and drew in the smoke from his pipe in little sharp puffs. Dalton chuckled, and attacked the meat and bread as a man does who has suffered hunger for some hours. For an interval there was no sound in the room save that made by the supping of the hungry man and the quick breathing of the dogs.

Then Dalton pushed back his stool and rising went to the doorway. The dogs, at his approach, slunk into a corner of the room, white teeth showing in a snarl, and back bristles erect.

"If I've had this trip for nothing, somebody is going to suffer," he said ominously. "Can you guess who that some one will be, Darbo?"

"Sacré," answered the other sullenly, "it is no fault of mine if dat feller does not come. Have I not done your bidding in everyt'ing?"

"So you say, but you see I'm not just satisfied. However, there is yet time." He drew out his watch and held its dial towards the spluttering light, then sat down, wiping his face free of the swarming mosquitoes with his sleeve.

"Stir up that smudge," he ordered, "and put that jug out of sight." He pushed the whiskey jug

away with his booted foot and felt in his pocket for his pipe.

The trapper rose and placed the jug in a roughly built cupboard, behind the table. Dalton followed him with level gaze.

"Look here, Darbo," he flashed, "you remember what I told you about drinking, when I made you one of the gang, don't you?"

"I jes tak one leetle drink to-day," explained the half-breed, squirming. "I have bad pain, here." He rubbed his left shoulder, and grimaced. "I get wet one night long tam ago, an' now I pay for dat, see?"

"Yes, I think I know the very night," insinuated Dalton darkly. "Up in Hell's Rapids, was n't it, Darbo?"

The half-breed sank down on a stool and did not answer. For long moments nothing more was said; then Dalton drew his stool up close beside the other man's, and leaned over towards him.

"Come, Darbo, tell me all about that time," he said amicably. "I have a reason for wanting to know all about it."

"I nevair was up dere," denied the half-breed angrily. "I guess I don't tell you anyt'ing, I don't know what you mean."

The big man reached over and gripped his shoulder. "Perhaps, if you have forgotten," he growled, tightening his grip and smiling as the other winced in pain, "you will try to remember. Don't you

recollect a night some eighteen years ago? You and your Injun half-brother were bringing a young couple up through the Thunder chain. You might have brought them through safely, but your laziness prompted you to take the shorter route. And" — he leaned close to note the effect of his words — "you tried Hell's Rapids. Perhaps some ulterior motive actuated you, eh, Darbo?"

"I don't understan' when you say dat," faltered the half-breed. "What you mean by heem, eh?"

"Nothing to speak of, Darbo. There was a box containing money and jewels, which, I understand, the young couple carried with them. You remember that box, I suppose?" His hard eyes bored the soul of the man crouching before him, and as no denial came, he laughed unpleasantly.

"I see you remember. Well, as I say, you tried the Rapids and were capsized in mid-centre. You and your brother swam to shore. You had no time to carry out any design you might have formed — understand" — as the trapper leaped to his feet — "I say *might* have formed. I do not accuse you of wanting to get possession of the box; I am less sure concerning the wily White Hawk. Knowing him, as I do, for a bad Injun, I simply state what I think, and I do think he wanted the box. However," — as the trapper flashed him an ugly look, — "that is neither here nor there. You left those two people to drown, or swim, or do whatever they best could, and you played the safe game. Being

Injuns you won through. If you had been white men, you might have saved them. As it was, you saved your own carcasses and left them to drown."

"Who tole you all dis?" cried the half-breed.

Dalton grinned, displaying strong yellow teeth. "You told me yourself, Darbo," he chuckled, "only you did n't know it. I just happened to hear a little confab between you and that man, Haight. I was hiding in the thicket. For some reason he 's interested in clearing up this mystery, and I overheard your story to him, and your offer to guide him to the Basin of White Water. You did n't speak White Hawk's name, — you were too cunning for that, — but you hinted that you could find the man who would give Haight all the information desired. You simply saw a chance to bleed this city chap, and took it. But," he added, with an oath, "if you *do* know who that man and woman were, *I want to know too.*"

Darbo sat huddled low, his nervous hands marking the cross on his breast, his livid lips moving.

"By the Holy Mother, I swear I know not de name of dem people," he said earnestly. "I was wit dem but one day. All I know is dey was from city. De man was damn Protestant. De woman was bootiful. We did not try to capsize dat canoe; I swear dat also. It all happen so queek! Poosh, and over we go, and de water she pour in.

"I sweem one hour, maybe two, I dunno. I fin' maself on shore nex' morning, an' all day I travel

t'ru bush. I fin' settlement at night, but say not'-ing. Nex' day I set out again, an' five day an' night I trek t'ru forest an' swim rivare.

"Den I get work in lumber mill. Six mont' I stay dere, but I hear not'ing about dat man an' woman till one day Hudson Bay trapper come in dere, an' I fin' out he from White Water Basin. From heem I learn somet'ing, an' dat is dat Algonquin Sagawa go out in hees big canoe, when he hear cry fer help. He save dem people from drown. Dat man tell me dat de man die before dey reach shore, an' de woman she die next day. I know no more, so help me, Jesu."

During the trapper's recital Dalton had sat with probing eyes focussed on his face. At its end he sat back and smoked quietly for a time. Then he said: "I believe what you have told me, Darbo."

"I swar on de cross dat it is true," cried the half-breed eagerly.

Dalton sat musing, a crafty leer on his face. "And so you are going to guide this fellow, Haight, up to the Basin of White Water?" he asked. "What in hell is his game, anyway?"

The half-breed shrugged. "Sacré, how should I know?" he answered.

"Of course," sneered Dalton, "you have told him more than I chanced to overhear — Oh, don't try to deny it," — as the half-breed attempted to protest, — "of course you have. But it was all lies, likely, to make him fall for your plant. You're

after his money. Well, get it, and be damned to you. When do you start for the Basin?" he asked.

"Soon," answered the half-breed.

Dalton glanced at him suspiciously, but before he could speak the words he would say, there sounded a soft footfall on the sward outside, and another man entered the cabin.

Darbo had twisted back into the shadows, close beside the dogs; Dalton lounging against the plank table, appraised the newcomer with hard, insolent eyes, deliberately taking his measure, from Strathcona boots to Stetson hat.

The object of his scrutiny returned the gaze calmly. "Well?" he said, "I'm here, at last, Dalton."

"So I see, Mr.— Timberley." Dalton rolled the name from his lips slowly, as though its sound tickled him. "And," he said caustically, "you'll notice I'm here before you."

"And the others?"

"They're within rifle-call. I thought maybe you'd want to discuss the preliminaries with me alone."

"There are no preliminaries, Dalton. You know what I want you to do. You said you'd put it up to the gang, and let me know to-night if they'd accept our — my proposition. Who in hades is that?" he asked suspiciously, for the first time catching sight of the half-breed in the shadows.

"Oh, that's only Darbo. You need n't mind

him; he's in on most of our plays. Suppose we get down to business, Mr. — Timberley."

"If it's just the same to you, Dalton, I'd like you to dwell less frequently and less lovingly on that name," said the other man sharply, as he seated himself on a stool.

Dalton laughed. "Oh, all right," he sneered; "only I understood it was part of your scheme to have your name pretty well advertised in this thing."

"I'll attend to the advertising," the other informed him grimly. "You'll find that you've got enough to do — providing," he added, "you agree to do what we — I mean, I — want done."

Dalton brought his heavy fist down on the table with a crash that made the candle splutter. "I'll do it," he promised, his face drawn in malignant hate; "not so much for the price you'll pay for the job, either, as for the fact that I owe Dorkin a grudge, damn him!"

"Good! when will you start in, then? I want you to give me time to show him and others my hand in this thing, but I can't stay here all summer."

Dalton crammed his hands into his pockets and paced the narrow floor of the cabin. Finally he paused before the table again, and spoke, flashing the other a glance from baleful eyes.

"It may be soon and it may not be so soon. I'll have to consult with my boys before I'll know."

"But you'll help me do it? That's all I wanted to be sure of to-night. I'll slip along back now."

The man on the stool arose and turned towards the door, then he stood rooted in his tracks. "Hell's fire!" he heard Dalton exclaim, "Sagawa, the Trail-Runner!"

## CHAPTER XII

THE tall Indian stood framed in the cabin's doorway; behind him a wall of forest, above which hung a chain of big white stars. The candle-light fell upon his face. His grave eyes rested on the men before him, then travelled to the dogs crouching in the corner, yellow orbs blinking straight into his.

"The white wolf is out again," he said. "Twice to-night his howl sounded from the swale-lands. He is crying out for the murderer of Sagawa's brother, the aged trapper."

"Sacré," muttered the half-breed, crossing himself. He had crept from the shadows into the candle-light. His swarthy face was drawn in abject terror.

Dalton turned angrily upon him. "Superstitious fool!" he growled. "No fear of the white wolf getting that upon which the devil holds a first mortgage. Stand up, Darbo, I want to have a look at you."

The half-breed had sunk into a chair. His head had fallen on his breast and his lips were moving dumbly. He did not heed the command, and Dalton reached forward and jerked him to his feet.

"Now," he asked, "why are you so wrought up about Daddy Farney's murderer being hunted?

Come, speak up, or by the Lord Harry, I'll throttle you!"

His grip tightened, but the trapper, by a quick movement, liberated himself, and leaping back, drew a long knife from his belt.

"Don't you touch me some more," he snarled, his teeth gleaming and his pig-like eyes flashing. "If you do, den I keel you, queek."

Dalton fell back a step, and a deep flush slowly mounted to his cheeks.

"Darbo," he said, his voice calm and hard, "you know me, and you know you'll have to suffer for making that threat. Put that knife on the table."

For the fraction of a second only, the half-breed's blazing eyes met the level ones of his master. Then, slowly, he turned and tossed the knife from him.

"I guess maybe I mak' mistak'," he muttered. "It was dat white wolf. Dieu! I am frighten'!"

The dogs, which had risen to stand for a tense moment with rigid muscles, resumed their former position in the corner, white fangs bared and neck bristles erect.

Sagawa, the Algonquin, broke the silence with a question.

"Why has White Hawk, your brother, hidden himself from the eyes of his people?" he asked fiercely, turning his blazing eyes on the half-breed.

"How am I to know dat?" flashed Darbo suspiciously.

The Indian turned towards the forest, and stood, his long arms folded across his massive chest, his grave eyes gazing beyond the star-strewn skies above the silent tamaracks. Darbo silently moved a little closer to the dogs. Dalton crouched above the spluttering smudge, his hands clenched, his heavy jaw set, his dark face twisted in an ugly frown. The other white man, who had resumed his seat on the stool, watched and waited, an enigmatical smile on his lips. The Algonquin turned slowly and again fastened his eyes on the half-breed.

"The forest is big and its trails lead always, somewhere," he said dramatically. "The springs of the woodland are many, but, always, there is a lake into which they empty. When hatred burns in the soul, the heart follows the red trail. The forest trails are hidden in a mist; the white streams are frozen; a blood-red trail stretches away to *Somewhere*. It is so when we hate. Sagawa knows. He has followed such trails. And at the end is vengeance. Three times he has sought for the end of the red trails, three times has he tasted vengeance, so that the old woodland trails, the white ribbons of streams, the star-dotted roof of his hunting-ground might lose the red mist that grew from hatred.

"But," he said, his voice growing deeper, "Sagawa has never killed save in fair fight. Foot to foot and shoulder to shoulder with his enemy, he has

fought and killed, and afterwards tried to forget the red trail, tried to remember only the old trails and streams. But . . ."

He ceased speaking and stood with lowered head. "White man may forget altogether," he continued gently. "Half-breed may remember but one half; but Indian—" He straightened up and his eyes flashed. "It is always here," he cried, striking his breast, "and the red mist is always there." He pointed outward to where the stars were drooping lower over the forest.

Once more he looked straight into the eyes of the half-breed.

"And now Sagawa again sees the red trail stretching across the upland, growing redder and deeper, and calling to him to follow it. From the time that he learned that his aged white brother fell, shot from behind by some enemy, the trail has called. The aged trapper was Sagawa's friend. He saved Sagawa from the Rapids, many moons ago. He fed him when he was hungry. Once, when Sagawa was sick with fever, his aged white brother watched beside him and nursed him back to health. He was a good man. He was Sagawa's brother. Sagawa, who has followed the red trail many days and nights, in vain, goes once more to follow it." One moment his sweeping gaze took in the face of each man present. Then he was gone.

For the space of a minute, following the Algonquin's departure, silence fell on the three in the

cabin. Dalton arose slowly from before the smudge and stood above Darbo.

"Did you kill Old Man Farney?" he asked in ominous tones. "Come, speak up, did you?"

Like a flash the half-breed slipped from his stool and backed between the alert, snarling huskies in the corner.

"Keep away from me!" he cried. "You touch me, and I sick dese dog on you." As he spoke, the larger of the huskies crept a little forward, crouching, belly low, and long tongue licking his spiked jaws.

"Ef I say so, Dalton, dese dog tear you to bits. I know. You keep off, dat's all."

"What's the matter in here?" spoke a gruff voice at the door.

Dalton turned, and a twisted smile flashed across his face as his eyes rested on the four men who had just entered.

"Hello, Gregg," he greeted the speaker, "just in time for the entertainment. Darbo here has been drinking and is inclined to be ugly; wants to sick his dogs on me because I used a little badinage with him. — This is Mr. Timberley," he introduced with mock solemnity, bowing low and waving his hand towards the man on the stool. "You know what he wants us to help him do."

Gregg, a short, heavy-set man, about twenty-eight years of age, with round, closely cropped head and long face, let his small eyes rest contemp-

tuously on the tweed-clad figure of the man before him, and grinned.

"You'll do," he said with a leer. Then, turning to Dalton, he asked: "Just what the 'ell's wrong, Abe? Your face is black as a cloud."

"Nothing," Dalton answered; "only Sagawa, the Algonquin, has hit the red trail again. Old Man Farney's killer is going to get his, sure."

Gregg took a chew of tobacco, and champed meditatively for a second or so.

"Well, what of it?" he asked.

"What of it?" echoed Dalton, his dark skin flushing. "You ask that! You act as though it were no news to you, Gregg."

"Well, for that matter, it is n't. I knowed it all along. Fact is, I was up thar, at Cove Haunt, the day Daddy Farney was buried, an' I overheard the Injun tellin' Dorkin what he intended to do. I was close enough fer that, all right, and close enough to hear that limb-of-the-devil, Danny Farney, promise his dead father he'd even things up with you. Seems the kid thinks you had something to do with the killin'," he chuckled. "Did ye?"

Dalton turned on him quickly, an ugly scowl blackening his face.

"Well, you have a lot of nerve," he growled, "to ask me that question; but you've got nerve enough for most anything. Some day one of your awkward questions is going to get you into trouble. I mean that," as Gregg laughed shortly. "Just

remember, when you're up here, you're in bad man's land, savey? So," he clenched his fist and lowered his voice, — "don't you get starting anything you can't finish or you'll get planted same as Old Man Farney!"

One of the other men spoke. "Would ye mind givin' us our orders, chief, whatever they are?" he asked. "I'm dead tired, an' I want to get back to my cabin."

"Right ye are, Harry," put in the somewhat discomfited Gregg. "But first, Abe, maybe you'd enlighten us as to how this Indian Sagawa's goin' out on the red trail is goin' to affect our plans?"

"How does a drowned rat in a milk pitcher affect the porridge?" snarled Dalton. "I tell you it's going to play the very devil with our plans, that's what it's going to do. That Algonquin and Dorkin are as thick as a couple of marooned toads on an island, so I've learned, and you can bet your bottom dollar, if he's Injun enough to kill the murderer of one friend, he's Injun enough to do it for another, even if he has to call out his whole damned tribe from the Basin of White Water, to help him. You'll admit he's too strong for us. That's why I've tried to get him *with* us."

He ceased speaking and glanced from face to face of the men grouped about him. "Old Man Farney's death has put Dorkin wise to everything," he went on impressively, "and with him wise to everything, it's not going to be so easy for us to

raid his Preserve. Wait—" as Gregg attempted to speak. "When I get through you can have your say. I've gone to a lot of trouble to plan this thing, and it means money to every man of us—and more than money to two of us"—he added, flashing a look at the big man by the table.

"But Dorkin is sure to be on his guard now, and will look after his own. You all know him. Now, then, what are we going to do? That's the question."

Darbo had crept out from between the protecting huskies, and something of his old-time swagger had returned. "One way, and bes' way, maybe, is to *get* Dorkin, heem," he said, sinisterly, his beady eyes glowing with hatred.

"You mean shoot him?" queried Gregg, with a grin.

"Maybe so, or—"

The half-breed picked up the long knife from the floor and made a significant gesture. "I s'pose," he said with a leer, "Abe Dalton would radder use de rifle—lak he did on Daddy Farney."

He laughed, but nobody joined him.

Dalton wheeled on the half-breed; his face had gone suddenly white, and a quiver shook his brawny arms as he proceeded to roll up his sleeves.

"What you goin' to do?" cried Gregg, in alarm.

"I'm going to give this half-breed what I've ached to give him ever since I first set eyes on his snaky face," answered Dalton gently, "and you

fellows are going to stand by and see me do it. You hear me; now, by God, you keep out of this; we'll see if I allow an Injun to call me a murderer."

Gregg sank back on a stool, and Dalton lifted down a lithe hickory wiping-stick from the rack.

"Gregg," he commanded, "take your rifle and keep an eye on those huskies. If they make a move, shoot them. Darbo, put down that knife — and come over here!"

"I'll see you —" commenced the half-breed.

But one of the men standing behind him struck his hand so that the knife fell to the floor, with a clatter, and gave him a push forward.

Dalton caught him by the scruff of the neck and shook him as a fox shakes a squirrel. "Now, my little snake," he grated, "here is where you pay!"

He lifted the half-breed and, holding him out at arm's length, struck him again and again with the supple wand. The wretched creature cried and begged and swore. He screamed a promise to kill his tormentor, but again and again the hickory fell, until at last his cries grew to a mere whimper. Then he was thrown between the grovelling dogs, where he lay groaning.

"There," panted Dalton, "that's over. Now, to return to the subject under discussion; what are we going to do about raiding Dorkin's Preserve?"

Gregg, a new respect in his tones, answered: "Why, we'll pull it off all hunky, Cap, don't you fear; an' soon too. The Algonquin has gone out on

his man-hunt, you say. All right, we'll do it while he's gone."

"What do you think, Mr. Timberley?" asked Dalton.

"I think the sooner we act, the better," answered the one addressed. "I said I would pay you a thousand dollars for helping me wreck the Preserve and get possession of the animals in the enclosure. Well, I'll raise that to fifteen hundred."

The eyes of Dalton and his henchmen sparkled, and their spirits rose with the thoughts of money easily earned.

"We'll do it!" they cried together.

"Don't you want us to get the girl, too, Mr. Timberley?" asked Dalton reaching for his rifle.

"What girl?"

Dalton looked his surprise. "You don't mean to say you did n't know that Dorkin had Old Man Farney's little Willow the Wisp, up there in the Retreat, do you? Well, then, he has, and I reckon for looks and ginger you'll have to walk some distance before you find her equal; eh, boys?"

"You're right thar, Cap," agreed his followers.

"She's living with Frenchy LaPeer and his wife, in the small cabin 'longside of Dorkin's," informed Dalton. "Just say the word, and we'll get her, too."

"Lor," grinned one of the younger men, "I'd rather try to cage Dorkin's old lynx, any time, than try to take The Wisp. I said somethin' to

her one day when I met her in the woods, an' she pointed her rifle at me an' cussed me like a sinner. Said if I valued my miserable carcass, I'd best get a movin', quick, An' I took her advice, too."

"Wal," said Gregg, "I guess maybe Willer, the Wisp 'ud make good anythin' she promised. I, fer one, would n't bank on her bein' afraid to pay an insult out, an' I know her; an' I know that hell-fiery brother of hern, too. I expect we'll have some trouble with that youngster."

The man who was to pay fifteen hundred dollars for the fulfilment of his desire stood up.

"You men go after Dorkin's animals, and wreck his Preserve," he said. "That's our work. And you're to leave the girl alone, understand? Now, once more," he asked, "can we do it?"

"We can and will," Dalton assured him, as he turned to depart. "And," he added, "we'll do it soon."

Not until they had gone and the sound of their voices had died did Darbo rise painfully from the corner into which he had been so ignominiously cast, and creep to the window.

The dogs dropped down to the floor and sank into quick, twitching slumber. The smudge died to a blurring, red eye; the candle spluttered and went out; and still the man stood beside the window gazing across the silent forest. "Sacré Mojie!" he sobbed, "some tam, I keel you, Abe Dalton. But firs' I go warn White Hawk."

# CHAPTER XIII

DORKIN was examining the engineering work of a young beaver colony, down near the southern boundary of his Preserve. The exhilaration of a success, due in a great measure to his own ingenuity in diverting a stream so as to partially flood the four acres of tableland, thus giving the clever, web-footed builders a perfect colony-site, tingled his veins and gave the golden summer's morning an added zest.

On a mossy knoll, a little way apart, sat Willow Farney. Beside her sprawled Larry, the setter, his heavy muzzle in the girl's lap, his brown eyes looking up into her face. As she smoothed his long hair, the girl watched Dorkin. He glanced up and caught her gaze fastened upon him, and he laughed happily as a boy.

"Is n't it wonderful, Willow?" he called. "Look at that dam, straight and true as a mason could lay it. I've always felt that the beavers should find a home in Hardwoods Preserve, and now, sure enough, they've found it."

"And, like as not, the ducks'll find it too, and jest naturally drift over here for a feed, once in a while," laughed the girl. "They're restless things, ducks, particularly the teal."

"Yes, but when they find that there is n't a grain

of wheat or corn to be found for their trouble, they'll drift back to Duck Lake again, Willow."

"But the otters 'll come, Dorkin," she warned. "They allers find the beavers. One old otter, slidin' in here some dark night, will kill ten times his weight in baby beavers. How are you goin' to keep them killers out?"

"Why, I guess we'll have to wait until they come and then figure out a way. No use borrowing trouble, eh, girlie?"

Willow lifted the dog's head against her face and became silent. Dorkin, coming softly up behind her, stood looking down at the picture the two made. There was in his heart a strange yearning to gather the girl up and crush her to him, to feel the warm caress of her cheek, as Larry was feeling it, but the yearning was as quickly suppressed. Why, she was nothing more than a slip of a girl, a little, wild, romping girl, — or *was* she? He became suddenly aware that she was no longer a little girl.

And this morning she was so beautiful, so exquisitely warm and alive; so alluring, and still so elusive, that his pulses beat quickly as he watched her, brown arms twined about the dog's neck, strong, brown throat gleaming beneath the low-cut doeskin blouse, her whole attitude bespeaking a poise which was the heritage of her forest.

"Willow, the Wisp," he said softly, unconsciously speaking aloud.

She lifted her head quickly and gazed up at him; but he did not meet her eyes.

"I'm going on to the house, Willow," he said abruptly. "You need n't come until you're ready."

He turned away and strode up the trail. Halfway to the Cabin he met Danny Farney who had just returned from Lookup with the mail.

Dorkin took the letters and papers from the boy, answering the question in his eyes with: "Willow is down yonder by the new beaver dam, Danny, planning how she's going to keep the otters from coming in and making a clean-up of the baby beavers."

Danny turned away; then paused. "There's some folks up at the cabin, Dorkin," he said, — "two people from the city, and Pa Washburn."

"Ah, is that so? Who are they? Did you get their names, Danny?"

"Yes, the girl's name is Edna Marsh, and the man's is Dayton. He's her uncle. The girl's got damn fine eyes. They're blue, Dorkin, with a sort of a pale green behind the blue, like the tint on a wild duck's egg."

He proceeded down the trail. Dorkin stood thinking, a deep furrow growing up between his eyes and his hands tightly clenching the letters which the bit of intelligence, imparted by Danny, had driven from his mind.

So *she* had come and found him too. First Timberley, to breathe unrest into his world, and now

the girl who was indirectly responsible for all he had suffered at Timberley's hands.

And what could he do? He was helpless to save himself the torturing memories they brought of failure, disgrace, and all the emptiness of that world he had placed — as he thought — far behind him.

What right had they to come and disturb, to menace, his happiness? It was not as though they could understand his shagland sanctuary as a broken body and spirit, which the sweeping solitude had reshaped and rebuilt, understood it. Why were they here? That world behind — the one in which he had failed and gone under — was their world. It had given to the one success and the plaudits of men; to the other, wealth and ease. And before both lay life which promised worth-while things. Why, then, were they here?

Slowly, with bent head, Dorkin walked up the trail, pondering this question. Coming to a sloping glade, spreading a carpet of moss green beneath the darker foliage of the trees, he paused and glanced about him. He knew that into his heart was creeping a fateful and dreaded unsureness of himself, that bitterness which a criminal, who has paid, and who, having sought a new world in which to live straight, feels, when he learns that the minion of the law has tracked him down and waits for him to err again.

That world behind him never forgot nor for-

gave — because it did not understand. This, his world, which raised a stronger, nobler tree where the wind-weakened one had gone down, and lifted flowers from the sward seared and blackened by fires, was all Forgiveness and Understanding. God knows he had learned this much. And he knew that all the sublime harmony of his world hung on this Great Understanding. Why then should the past be brought to him, here?

He sank down on a knoll and let his face rest against the rough bark of a tree. Far down, across a sparsely wooded valley, beyond a jagged line of coniferous forest, he saw the peaks of Old Creation Hills sleeping beneath a low sky of swimming blue, and between him and the hills white, tiny lakes cradled in green valleys. Between the lakes he glimpsed white ribbons of streams, twisting, disappearing in frowsy copse of fir, reappearing only to be lost again between wooded banks.

Beyond him, from the breeding-grounds, came the voices of his wild things. The low cluck of nesting grouse, the not unmusical voice of the mother coon scolding her babies, the shrill bark of fun-loving fox, the sniffing whimper of newly weaned bear cubs, and above them the voice of Pete, singing, as he made his round of the kennels: —

"I lak dat boy what play de fiddle,
An' sing somet'ing to me.
He ver' good boy and sail de vessel
He nam' La Belle Marie.

I promise heem we will get marry,
Before the snow she fly;
Bon soir, old Sea, we live on cabin,
Where de mountain scrape de sky."

Dorkin smiled, as the notes of the song died away. What a grand thing it was to know that there was such loyalty as Pete's. Truly the little Frenchman had been a wonderful help to him.

He turned his head, as the bushes on his left parted, and with a laugh of welcome held out his arms. Out from the shadows bounded the big lynx, Lulu, to throw herself at his feet and twist over on her back, all four paws in air.

Dorkin drew one of the paws to him, and examined its long, knife-like claws, and his face grew serious.

"I don't know as it's wise to let you roam at large this way, old cat," he told her, letting go the paw and stroking her yellow nose.

She purred hoarsely, and lay, mouth half open, gazing up at him from amber slits of eyes. Then, as though she discerned that something was troubling this one being in the world which her wild heart had learned to trust, she sat up and licked the hands locked about his knees.

"Where did you leave your kittens, Lulu?" he asked.

She reared up, her paws on his knees, and shoved her moist nose in his ear. He put his arm around her and patted her side.

"Please don't evade the question, Queen Lulu," he insisted; "where are your kittens?"

But the big cat, in answer, simply closed her sharp teeth on his felt hat and bounding down, lay, twitching her short tail, and daring him to chase her.

Just here, from a copse on the left, came a faint sound of distress, or loneliness, and, dropping the hat, Lulu bounded into the thicket. A few minutes later, Dorkin saw her leading her four kittens across a little glade, a hundred yards distant.

Again his gaze wandered to the far picture of the hills, valleys, and forest, far beneath him. Perhaps, after all, he was laying claim to too much, he thought, bitterly. What right had he to resent the coming of others, even although they did bring him unhappy memories of a world in which hope, for him, had been slain? Timberley, he felt, would harm him further if he could. Had he not admitted as much? Well, he could fight a man, but how about this girl, this Edna Marsh?

He wondered what she would say when she learned that the man she had seen go down, a social and moral wreck, and Dorkin, the woodsman, were one, — what would she say?

The perspiration sprang out on his brow. Well, what could she say? She would, of course, think him a coward. Any man is a coward who runs away from a fight. She would want to know why he had not stayed and vindicated himself, if he

were innocent. If he were innocent— he laughed shortly, and the blood leaped to his bronzed cheek. Of course she believed him a quitter. But why was she here?

He recalled his first meeting with Edna Marsh. It was at a Rugby game on the campus. He had glimpsed her animated face among the cheering spectators after he had struggled with the ball to victory. Later, at a party given in honor of his college team, he had been formally introduced to her. He had thought her very beautiful. Afterwards they had met many times. She had seemed to prefer his company to that of Timberley. Boylike, this had pleased him. Then had come a day when, during the intermission of the final game of the championship series, Timberley had so far forgotten himself as to sneer an insult at Dorkin, mentioning her name. Dorkin had promptly knocked him down, not once but several times, and had had the satisfaction of seeing him carried from the field.

It was during the latter half of that decisive game which had given to his college the trophy so greatly desired, that he had received the injury to his shoulder, and had been given morphine to deaden the pain. From that moment he had possessed an appetite for the drug. But the craving was not so strong as his will, and he would have fought it and beaten it, he knew, had fate not stacked the cards against him.

Then had come the theft of the examination

papers, his disgrace and expulsion from college. He had stood alone — outside. Not one friend, not one hope. And like a wounded thing, he had crept away. Hidden in an isolated part of the city, he had given himself up to the drug completely. Then, just before the end, something had called him, and he had come here.

Dorkin looked about him. His eyes were humid, his hands when he unclasped them from about his knees, trembled. A deadly longing for the false solace which had dragged him down in that other world, grew up in his sick heart. Then he shook himself, squared his shoulders, and drew himself away from memories which pulled him back and down.

He would meet Edna Marsh as he had met Timberley. Let her think what she might.

Slowly he made his way across the glade, through the hickory grove to the cabin. Passing around the cabin, he came upon her.

She was seated in a low, rustic chair, looking down the path to the lake, on which the coot and teal were weaving brown and blue-grey patterns, as they fed.

So engrossed was she in the view, that she did not hear his step. He stood, gravely surveying her, admiring the dull gold of her hair, the exquisite coloring of her cheek. She was very beautiful, he told himself.

"Miss Marsh?" he said.

At the sound of his voice, she leaped to her feet.

"I'm Dorkin," he explained, as her wide eyes opened wider, and gazed up into his face.

Her own face had gone pale. She held out a slim gloved hand, and he held it in his a moment while he said:—

"Welcome to Hardwoods Preserve! You must be tired after the long tramp across the Portage. If you'll excuse me, I'll step inside and have Mrs. LaPeer prepare some refreshments. By the way," as he turned towards the door, "Danny spoke of Mr. Washburn and your uncle being here. I presume they are down with LaPeer, looking over the grounds?"

"Yes, they—" She hesitated, looking up at his face again.

He smiled, then immediately his face grew grave as he noted her lip tremble.

"Of course you have recognized me," he said. "Yes, I'm Stanley." He could not help the cynicism creeping into his voice. "But," he added quickly, "up here, I am Dorkin. It was my mother's name, you know. I did n't care to take anything from that past, back yonder."

"No," she whispered, "no, of course not. Would you mind if I sat down again, Mr. Dorkin? The walk has tired me more than I thought."

"Wait." He stepped into the cabin and returned with a big rough oaken chair, the back and seat of which were composed of tanned bearskin.

"You will find this more comfortable," he told her. "Please try it."

The girl sank down into its comfortable depths, with a sigh. "Oh, it's rest itself!" she exclaimed.

He stood looking down at her. Silence fell between them. Her eyes were once more turned to the lake.

At last he spoke. "Doubtless, you are surprised to find me here, Miss Marsh?"

She did not answer him at once. Then her eyes once more appraised his big, athletic figure, resting finally on the boyish face. "I suppose we all find the place to which we belong — some day," she said as though to herself. "I did not know that in the man who had been reclaimed by this wonderful forest, I would find — you," she said wonderingly, "but I am glad it is you — I am glad."

"Are you?" he asked eagerly. "Then tell me, why are you glad?"

"Why, because" — she hesitated, her cheeks flaming scarlet — "because it proves you to be just as strong, just as gentle, just as big as God had intended you should be."

He sank down on the block opposite her. "It's splendid of you to think that," he replied. "But I don't deserve it. I am neither strong — as you mean strong — nor gentle. And of all His creatures which God has placed in this solitude which has remade me, I am perhaps the smallest.

"Listen," as she shook her head in protest, "I

am still something of an alien here, you see. I came up to this place a physical wreck. I wanted to be alone at the end. I was practically done. Well, as I say, I strayed up here, or rather we'll say I was drawn up here. I like to think of it that way," he smiled — "drawn up here. And this forest helped me to fight back to — manhood. It gave me an antidote for hopelessness, for sad memories, for hellish craving. It whispered hope. It took me in its arms and cradled me back to sane and safe understanding. It said to me, 'You are a little stray-away. You are tired, cross, discouraged. Let me point out the way to you.'"

The girl was leaning forward, lips parted, eyes shining. "And you said?"

"I said, 'Why do you do this for something which has had its chance and failed?' You see, this was before I had learned not to question my great Mother. But she was tolerant and she answered, 'Some day you will know.'"

He paused, the old pensiveness she had glimpsed at their meeting creeping back into his face.

"It is not necessary to tell you how low I had fallen," he said with an effort. "You already know. I was a failure, — a weakling, a moral and physical wreck, and" — he added huskily — "I had lost all faith in humanity, even in God Himself!"

There was pain in his deep eyes turned upon her sympathetic ones, pain and distress and shame.

"Sometimes, I wonder why there are not more

wrecks than there are — in that world where I went down," he said. "There are so many — so very many sailing aimlessly, without a compass."

"You mean without faith?" she whispered.

"Yes."

He smiled brightly. "Up here, you see, it is all so different. You can no more help believing in God than you can help breathing His air or wondering at His works. You love Him because He is the life you love, full and satisfying; you follow Him because His trails lead to happiness and contentment. And do you know why His kindred follow Him, believe Him, love Him? Look, this is why."

He placed his hand in a pocket and took out a few kernels of corn, at the same time giving a low, whistling call, and to the girl's surprise, from a little patch of wild-rose trees, almost at her feet, there darted a small partridge hen. Straight across to the keeper she sped, clucking and dragging her wings, quickly to swallow the sweet grains he held out to her.

He turned to the girl. "There is the answer," he said. "That little bird has learned to trust me because she knows I supply her with food. Perhaps, too, she possesses sufficient reasoning powers to realize that I protect her. Well, that is exactly my attitude towards the Creator of this world which has rebuilt me. Not much of a religion, perhaps, as those Christian people of that world behind me would think it — but quite sufficient for me."

"I think it a wonderful religion," said the girl, — "big, gripping in its simplicity."

"Yes, it's that," he agreed. "Its fundamentals, too, are the same as the religion preached from your million-dollar churches in the city. You must have pipe-organs and grand singers to draw the tardy worshippers there; you must have silver-tongued ministers to hold them there and send them away satisfied. Have you ever stopped to consider how great a part music plays in the uplift of humanity, Miss Marsh?"

She was silent, and he went on, his strong face aglow with feeling. "I am speaking to you like an evangelist, you who have never been tempted, never failed, you who have found the world good to live in. But I am no evangelist, no preacher, I am simply the big brother of the wild kindred, trying to do what has been pointed out for me to do. And I want you to know that I have found the grandest music, the sublimest sermons, the truest loves of the world, right here in its spaces of solitude."

"I believe you," she replied earnestly. She looked at him, a new respect in her eyes. "Would it, do you think, do for others what it has done for you?" she asked eagerly. "Supposing there was some one else, a man, who, like you, had within him a wonderful power for good, who, like you, had become warped—" She paused, the red flooding her face and temples.

Dorkin was watching her gravely. There was

no sign that he had noted her confusion, as he answered: "Few men could dwell beneath the spell of this forest for long, without experiencing a sense of their own littleness. Once a man realizes that — and there is hope."

She sat looking away, her slim hands tightly clenched together in her lap, her big, violet eyes dark with feeling. When she spoke, it was obviously with an effort.

"There is something I must tell you," she said strainedly. "There is one man —" She caught her breath quickly.

"I know," he said quietly. "You mean Timberley. Please say no more; I know all you would tell me."

"He is your enemy."

"No, he's his own enemy. Any man who hates without cause is his own enemy."

She flashed a quick, wondering glance at him.

"Believe me," he said, "I am nevertheless grateful to you for being willing to say what must be difficult; but it is not necessary for you to warn me that I must watch Timberley — and others who would harm my Preserve and its wild things." His voice was deep with feeling.

Impulsively the girl held out her hand.

He took it with a smile. "Come," he invited, "to the cabin and tea. Then away to see the wonders of Hardwoods Preserve."

She stood up. A strand of golden hair was tossed

by a zephyr across her eyes. He watched her catch, with some difficulty, the truant and imprison it beneath her wide hat.

Beautiful she was, beyond a doubt, he thought.

Then, noiselessly, a clump of cedars, just in front of them, parted. Willow Farney stood there, straight, tall, a veritable part of this solitude.

Her head, with its mass of waving brown hair, was lifted proudly, her red lips were parted, her big grey eyes held a look which might have been fear were it not for the world of pensiveness in their depths. Then, quite as suddenly as she had appeared, she was gone.

Quickly his eyes sought the other girl. She stood smiling, arms half outstretched, gazing at the spot where Willow had stood. "Oh," she whispered, "what a wild, beautiful girl."

"That was Willow," Dorkin informed her. "The Wisp, the woods-folk call her, because she comes and goes — as you saw her do. She is my ward," he explained, noting the look of wonder in Edna's eyes. "She lives with the LaPeers. I promised her dead father to look after her. I am troubled about her education. It would kill her to send her away from the forest. Perhaps," he added hopefully, "you can help me by suggesting some means whereby she might be instructed without having to send her too far away."

"Perhaps I can," she agreed readily. "Do you think she will be friends with me?" she asked eagerly.

Dorkin smiled. "I hope so," he said, "but you will perhaps find Willow odd, in some ways. If you succeed in winning her friendship, Miss Marsh, you will have won something worth while."

"Oh, I am sure of it!" she cried. "I have heard of Willow Farney, from the Washburns and others. I met her brother, quite by accident on the trail, one morning, and he told me about her, too. Incidentally," she laughed. "he paid me a very nice compliment. I am sure Danny and I shall be friends."

"He's a grand chap, Danny," Dorkin replied; "hot-headed, hot-hearted, and impetuous, but loyal to the core. But come," he said lightly, "let me lead you to the tea and cakes which Mrs. La-Peer has prepared for you, and you must make yourself comfortable in the cabin while I seek my other guests."

## CHAPTER XIV

DORKIN found Pa Washburn and Mr. Dayton down in that part of the enclosure where all the animals meant for shipment during the coming autumn were kept by themselves. LaPeer was showing the visitors about.

"Hello, Big Boy," was Washburn's greeting when he spied Dorkin. "And how goes the world of wild things?"

Dorkin laughed. "Fine, Pop; fine," he answered.

"Mr. Dayton, sir," said Pa Washburn proudly, "this is *him*."

Dorkin glanced searchingly at the thin face of the city man and was relieved to note no look of recognition in his eyes, as Mr. Dayton held out his hand with a word or two of congratulation. "You have a wonderful place here, Mr. Dorkin," he said enthusiastically: "a wonderful place."

"There are many almost as wonderful for the seeking," returned Dorkin; "millions of acres of wonders, Mr. Dayton."

"Yes, it's all wonderful," agreed the older man. His eyes were following Washburn and LaPeer, who had withdrawn to the far side of the enclosure.

Dorkin noted that the banker had aged greatly since the time he had last seen him in the city. He was frailer; his hair was whiter, and there was that in his shifting glance and twitching movements

which told of mental or nervous strain. He caught a quick sigh of pain, or weariness, as the city man sank to a mossy mound.

"You have had quite a long walk, Mr. Dayton," he said concernedly. "It's pretty much all uphill from Lookup, here."

"I do feel a little tired," the other confessed. "By the way," he asked, "did you, by any chance, come across my niece, on your way here, Mr. Dorkin?"

"Yes, indeed, she is having tea with Mrs. LaPeer. Perhaps you would like to join her?" Dorkin suggested.

Mr. Dayton shook his head. "No tea for me, thanks," he grimaced. "We're enemies."

Dorkin leaned against a tree and smiled at the wry expression on the old man's patrician face. "You'll be friends again before you leave these big woods," he assured him. "I mean, of course," as the banker lifted his brows, "you will be able to drink a cup of tea without distress, if you care to."

"Which is another way of saying that there is a cure in this wilderness of yours for every malady — including dyspepsia?" smiled his visitor. "My boy," he said, "I'd like to believe you," — and his face grew serious, — "but that would be too good. And still," he added, perplexedly, "I must admit this world up here makes one feel — different."

He looked quickly up at Dorkin. "Mr. Dorkin," he said, hesitatingly, "I'm getting to be an old man, and I am far from strong. You have youth

and strength. Will you, I wonder, forgive what may well seem to be presumption on my part, if I ask you a question?"

"Please ask it," Dorkin invited.

"It is this, then." Mr. Dayton shifted uneasily and cleared his throat. Obviously he was finding it difficult to say what he wished to say.

"You were, I understand, with the old trapper, Mr. Farney, when he died," he said at length. "Please tell me, did he mention to you anything concerning one George Graydon, an artist, or his wife, Annilee, both of whom lost their lives by drowning, some eighteen years ago, in a river adjacent to the lake known as the Basin of White Water?"

He paused, searching Dorkin's face, his lips twitching and his hands trembling.

Dorkin shook his head. "No," he answered, "Daddy Farney never told me anything concerning such people."

"Thanks." Mr. Dayton took a silk handkerchief from his pocket, and wiped his brow. "Mr. Graydon was my friend," he explained, "and his wife — she was very beautiful. The terrible tragedy of their untimely death has cast a shadow over my whole life, Mr. Dorkin."

He paused to wipe his eyes, and in a husky voice went on: "They left no heir to the quarter million dollars they left behind; the fortune reverted to a little niece whom they had left in my care."

He glanced beseechingly up at Dorkin. His eyes were humid.

"I have tried to take poor George's place, Mr. Dorkin. Edna is a sweet, good girl, and has been the sunshine of my life for nineteen years, although there are no blood ties between us. She has learned that it was in this district that her uncle and aunt lost their lives. Perhaps it is but natural that, loving her as I do, I should strive for a shred of intelligence to give her?"

"Most natural, sir," cried Dorkin sympathetically. "I am only sorry I have no news for her. It is barely possible, though, that Sagawa, the Algonquin, would know something concerning the tragedy," he added hopefully. "When he comes again I can question him, if you wish?"

Mr. Dayton pondered a moment, then shook his head.

"On second consideration, perhaps it would be best not to," he reflected; "for, after all, what good purpose would it serve? On the other hand, might it not reopen the wound in her bereaved heart now at least partially healed? No, much as I should wish to know that poor George left some word or token for her, — for us, — perhaps we had better say nothing more about it, Mr. Dorkin."

Dorkin bowed. "As you wish," he said.

Mr. Dayton stood up. "Might I ask that you treat what I have said to you as confidential?" he requested, almost pleadingly.

"Assuredly, Mr. Dayton."

The banker stood looking down and across the valley.

"There is another matter about which I would speak," he said hesitatingly. "There is a man by the name of Timberley up here. I understand that he does not like you. Pardon me, Mr. Dorkin; perhaps I should not obtrude myself in your personal affairs, but please know I am actuated only by a desire to serve you a good turn."

Again he looked quickly at Dorkin, who bowed an acknowledgment of his thanks.

"You see," said Mr. Dayton, his whole manner changing, "I know him, sir, for the damned cur he is. I have reason to know him — I —"

Passion strangled him. He was white and shaking. But with an effort he mastered his feelings, and went on more calmly: —

"You are a man, Mr. Dorkin, and I know you will understand. I would like you to know just what a hound this Timberley is. He deliberately won my ward's love and her consent and mine to become his wife, his purpose being to secure her fortune. How do I know this? He got drunk, one night, and boasted of it. By God, sir, he dragged her name into his bar-room filth, and laughed over his conquest with his drunken associates. I heard of it. I went to his office. I accused him. First he denied. Then he confessed that he had said it.

"I went back to the little girl who loved that

hound and believed in him. I told her all. She did not for a moment question the truth of my statement. God love her, never in her whole life has she had reason to do that — She wrote him a brief note and sent him back his ring. Next day we came up here, Mr. Dorkin. He has followed us. He will injure us in some way — if he can."

Again he sought his handkerchief and wiped his brow.

"Mr. Dorkin," he said apologetically, "I have no right to burden you with our troubles. You must pardon an old man who has been somewhat carried away, to-day, in the contemplation of a villain's intended perfidies. But I wished you to understand fully the kind of man you have to deal with."

"Then you know, for a certainty, that he intends disturbing me?" Dorkin asked gravely.

"Yes; I met him on the trail the other day, and, among the other pleasant things he told me, was that he intended to drive you out of this place."

"I am grateful to you for warning me, Mr. Dayton," said Dorkin warmly. "I shall be on my guard. Already, I think I have found signs of Timberley's master hand — and I shall watch for others. Now," he said, laying his big hand on the thin arm of his visitor, "you must come to the cabin and have some refreshments. I would very much like you and your niece to remain my guests for a few days, if you can, so as to prove to you the wonderful

things which can be done with our wild friends, through simple kindness."

Mr. Dayton murmured a few well-chosen words of thanks. "You are most kind and considerate, Mr. Dorkin," he said, as they turned back towards the cabin, "but I fear I am forced to deny ourselves the honor of more than a day's visit with you, at this time. May I tax your confidence a little further by telling you exactly why?"

He glanced apprehensively up at Dorkin, then, as though assured by the woodsman's steady gaze, he proceeded. "The fact is, I am interested in securing the option on a large pulpwood tract, a considerable distance north of here," he explained, "and as, for certain reasons, I do not wish to appear, personally, in the deal, I am working through an agent. That agent is in the vicinity of Lookup, now, and expects to be able to give me a definite report soon. It is necessary that I meet him for a little time each day, Mr. Dorkin, although it humiliates me greatly to be obliged to do so secretly. You see," he smiled, his nervous fingers giving Dorkin's arm a fatherly pressure, "I have promised my physician and dear Edna that I will entirely banish thoughts of business while up here in your forest Elysium. Thus," he sighed, "am I forced to resort to stealth, which I abhor."

Dorkin, catching the self-contempt in the old man's face, felt strangely drawn towards him. Surely, he thought, Edna Marsh had been most

fortunate in having for her guardian one so solicitous of her slightest wish.

"Mr. Dayton," he said, as they reached the cabin, "please look upon Hardwoods Retreat as open to you and Miss Marsh at all times. When you have concluded your business with your agent, it would please me greatly to have you spend a part of your vacation here."

Mr. Dayton cleared his throat. He did not answer. But the hand on Dorkin's arm tightened a little before it was lifted.

It was late afternoon when Dorkin's visitors departed for Lookup. Pa Washburn, his corn-cob pipe alight, his blue eyes dancing with appreciation of his city boarders' expressions of wonder and delight at the marvelous things Dorkin was doing in his Hardwoods Retreat, proudly led the way down the trail to the first portage.

"I'm tellin' you," he shouted over his shoulder, "nobody else in the world could 'a' done it but him. Why, by the flattailed beaver! that Dorkin knows wild things so well he could walk right in on a sleepin' grizzly an' scratch it under the chin. I've seen him pick a she black's cubs right up from under her very nose — just arter she's been hibernatin' too, an' cross as blazes. An' what did she do, d'ye s'pose? Why, ding it all, she tore round some, an' scolded, but she ended by follerin' him into the Preserve. That's a she bear every time.

She'll wade through hell-fire to get with her cubs."

Edna Marsh, who was walking next to Pa Washburn, came out of her abstraction to laugh at the native's words.

"I quite agree with you, Mr. Washburn," she said. "Nobody else could have done it."

The guide turned his head quickly, to give her a quizzical look. Her face flushed, but she met it unwaveringly.

They proceeded in silence for some distance. They were now travelling a trail running parallel with the Preserve. A twist in it brought to view a widening glade, with a tiny lake lying like a teal's blue-white egg on a nest of brown rushes. Edna was about to express her delight at the view when she felt her uncle grip her arm. He pointed across to the hardwoods. The girl's eyes followed, and she gave a little gasp. Standing, in full view of them, some hundred yards away, his back towards them, was a man dressed in grey tweeds and broad, Stetson hat. As they watched him, he raised a rifle, fired at something beyond him, and quickly vanished among the trees.

Washburn, who had turned about at Edna's exclamation, in time to catch sight of the vandal, cursed beneath his breath.

Mr. Dayton stood, trembling, gripping a tree for support. "Timberley," he gasped, his eyes seeking the girl's. Her face had gone deathly pale.

She drooped and swayed slightly. Washburn sprang forward and caught her as she fell.

"She's fainted," he informed her guardian. "We'll lay her down on the moss, here. You hold her so, while I go get some water."

Twenty minutes later, Edna's eyelids fluttered, and she came back to consciousness with a sigh. Mr. Dayton was bathing her temples. For a time she lay passive, then she struggled to a sitting posture.

"She'll be all right now." Washburn assured the banker. "Jest let her rest a bit while I try and find out what that skunk's been doin'."

He turned away towards the enclosure.

"Uncle," said the girl, a catch in her voice, "it was Tom!"

Mr. Dayton was silent.

"Oh," she sobbed, "to think of it! It all seems so incredible, so horrible!"

"Forget it, dear," he comforted. "Surely if you had a shred of regard still remaining for him, it is now destroyed, Edna."

She leaned back against a tree and closed her eyes.

Pa Washburn was coming back up the path. Under his arm he carried a tiny, spotted animal with long legs and ears, and big, velvety eyes.

He came forward and laid his little burden in the lap of the girl.

Edna caught her breath in wonder and surprise.

"Oh, the sweet little thing!" she cried. "What is it, Mr. Washburn?"

"It's a fawn, Miss," the settler answered, his voice quivering with rage. "That sneak shot its mother. I found her lyin' dead, an' this little baby deer standin' beside her."

The girl's eyes grew wide with horror. "He shot its mother, you say?" her lips mumbled stiffly. "Oh, no! Surely not — not that!"

"Edna, dear," begged her uncle, "compose yourself." He glanced imploringly at Washburn.

"I'm terrible sorry I told ye about it, Miss," said the native, simply. "I was n't knowin' you'd take it that-away."

The girl was crying now, the little fawn gathered close in her arms. Its wee black muzzle pressed her warm neck; its liquid eyes were hidden beneath its long lashes. It slept.

"I'll have to go back and tell Dorkin," said Mr. Washburn. "I won't be very long gone; it's not more'n two miles back."

Edna made as though to hand him the baby deer, but he shook his head. "I guess maybe you kin keep that leetle thing, if you so mind," he told her. "Dorkin, I'm sure, would be only too willin', an' she'll make you a nice pet. Do you want to keep her?" he asked gently.

"Oh, if I only might!" cried Edna. "The lovely, wee thing. See how it snuggles against my face, uncle!"

Washburn grinned. Sunshine was showing after tears. It was well. "I'll jest mosey along," he remarked, and started up-trail with long, swinging strides.

In less than an hour he was back. His deep eyes gleamed with righteous indignation and his carroty, grey-streaked goatee bristled angrily beneath his set mouth.

"It's all right fer that man, Timberley, to monkey with gunpowder, if his taste so runs," he growled, as he lifted the sleeping fawn from the girl's arms and tucked it beneath his arm. "But I'm not envyin' him his place when Dorkin brings him to a show-down, not me."

They passed, in silence, down the remaining part of the upper portage.

As Washburn drew their canoe from the copse of willows, along the lake, another canoe, manned by a white man and a half-breed, rounded a point close at hand. Washburn made a motion to those behind him, putting the bushes between himself and the shore at the same time. The canoe passed close beside their hiding-place without its occupants guessing their proximity.

"That's the half-breed, Darbo," whispered Washburn. "I've never seen the white feller before, but they're like in on this deviltry. I'll jest watch them gents, and if they turn in towards the Preserve, I'll back-trail 'em, by ginger!"

But the canoe which bore Haight and Darbo did

not turn in towards the Preserve. It kept straight on upstream. Washburn waited till a distant crook of the bank hid it, then he stepped out from his hiding-place.

"You saw that half-breed," he said, turning to Edna and her uncle. "Well, I bet anythin', either him or his half-brother, White Hawk, could tell who it was shot Daddy Farney."

"And who is White Hawk?" inquired Mr. Dayton.

"He's a thievin', murderin' Injun." Washburn spat disgustedly, and screwed up his face in a grimace. "A lone wolf that's been cut off from the pack, and one jest about due to make his last stand, I guess."

"Then the law is after him?" Mr. Dayton asked the question so eagerly that his guide turned to look at him.

"Yes," he answered slowly, "but not the law you city folks knows. It's the big, simple law of this forest, which reads, 'Everythin' pays sooner or later.' "

As they drifted downstream, Edna, in the stern of the canoe, cuddled the motherless fawn and watched the glorious lights weaving above Old Creation. It was a sight she never tired of. Each sunset seemed to the girl to be more wonderful than the last. But to-night those tints of amethyst and gold gleamed mistily through her tears. In her heart of hearts lay shattered a tiny hope which she had treasured.

The lights above the hills faded to ochre and drab, beneath which the tree-spiked horizon became a darker line. From copse and forest night-birds voiced their gladness. From the far swales drifted up the call of feeding marsh birds, and from the sleeping lake came the laughter of the loons.

With face against the wee fawn, Edna sat, thinking — thinking; remembering how she had loved and trusted the man who had slain the mother of this little forest creature, taken innocent life that he might hurt the man whom he hated. She had seen him, with her own eyes, deliberately commit the premeditated sacrilege. The golden head sank lower above the spotted atom of life sleeping in the protecting warmth of her arms, and her tears came fast. She found herself murmuring, "No, no, it cannot be!" — and despised the undying trust in her heart which prompted its utterance. Once and for all time she would force his memory from her. She wanted to hate and despise him for the cheat and villain he was. But, oddly, his face kept lifting above the débris of wrecked love and shattered hope, rising before her vision, strong and true, with eyes that pleaded for her not to shut him out forever.

The night had fallen by the time they reached Lookup Landing, the soft, scented night of the North, full of silence and mystery and peace. Up the path from the landing, Edna passed, one arm about her uncle's shoulders and the other holding the still-sleeping fawn.

Ma Washburn, sleeves tucked above elbows, motherly face beaming welcome and good cheer, greeted her boarders with, "I do declare but it's good to see you back again." Then, catching sight of the tiny, spotted animal in Edna's arms, she opened her mouth in wonder.

"Why, it's a new-born fawn," she cried, as Edna placed the little thing in her arms. "How did you come by it now?" she asked as she stroked its slender nose.

Edna and her uncle exchanged glances, but Washburn, who had come in in time to hear the question, was quick to answer: —

"I guess its mother met with an accident, Ma. Wolves, most like. We found it, anyways, an' brought it along." Then, as Edna and Mrs. Washburn turned into the kitchen to heat milk for the fawn, Pa Washburn took occasion to whisper in Mr. Dayton's ear, "It's hard fer Ma to keep anythin' to herself, so we'd best say nuthin' about that chap, Timberley, afore her."

But it was scarcely three quarters of an hour later, as he and Ma Washburn sat alone at the supper table, their guests having finished and gone to their respective rooms, that Pa Washburn, after much squirming and clearing of his throat, leaned across towards his wife and said: —

"Ding it, Ma, I've never kept anythin' from you yet, and I'm not goin' to keep this. We saw that man, Timberley, in Dorkin's Preserve this arter-

noon, and we saw him deliberately up and kill that little thing's mother." He looked across to where the fawn, newly fed, was sleeping sweetly on an old coat behind the stove.

"Well, he must be a low-down brute, ter do a thing like that!" exclaimed the woman. "Does Dorkin know it?" she asked quickly.

Washburn nodded grimly. "I told him."

"An' what did he say, Pa?"

"Wall, Dorkin ain't a man as says much at any time. He jest stood up slow an' drew in his breath. I would n't want ter be in that Timberley's shoes, I kin tell you."

"No," said Ma Washburn, "I should certainly say not."

# CHAPTER XV

DORKIN was eating his breakfast in the big room of the cabin whose wide window overlooked the grove. The window was open and through it drifted the sweet odors of wild plants and the fresh smell of the water.

On a bearskin rug lay the setter, his long muzzle resting between his paws, one brown eye fastened on his master.

Suddenly, above the wild, clamoring voices of the wild birds, came a burst of silvery laughter.

Dorkin arose hastily and, crossing over to the window, looked out. What he saw caused a shudder to run through his form and his cheek to pale. On the green sward, close beside the cabin, sat Willow Farney. Her buckskin skirt was tucked closely about her knees. In her lap she held an awkward-looking lynx-kitten, while three more sprawled and played at her feet. Close beside her, yellow eyes watching her every movement, crouched Lulu, the mother.

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Dorkin, "what can the child be thinking of! Willow!" he called, and it cost him an effort to keep his voice steady, "don't move, don't speak, sit right where you are, until I come to you."

The girl paid not the slightest attention to his words. She picked another grey, clawing ball from

her lap up in her bare arms and rubbed its pink nose against her cheek. A moment later, Dorkin, the perspiration standing out on his brow, was beside her. Swiftly he stepped between her and the mother lynx, and keeping his eyes on the latter, reached behind him.

"Let me have the kitten, Willow," he said. "Child," as he took the fluffy thing and laid it down beside its mother, "have you no comprehension of danger at all? Do you know what might have happened to you if old Lulu had taken it into her round head that you were trying to rob her of her baby?"

He sank beside her on the sod and drew her over against him. His hand stroked her wavy hair, his troubled eyes looked into the clear grey ones raised to his.

"Willow," he said, "you make my heart ache, sometimes, ache with fear for you."

"Why?" she asked wonderingly.

"Because you are so venturesome, because you do not seem to realize what danger is. Since you have been here, roaming at will among the wild things, I have scarcely known an easy moment."

She laughed derisively. "I ain't scared of any wild animal," she affirmed. "That old Lulu sort of likes me, anyway. Why, yesterday, when you and Pete were down at the muskrat colony, I was beadin' a doeskin jacket out there under that old maple across from Lulu's cage. She saw me there

and whined for me to come and let her out. I did n't intend to do it, 'cause I remembered what you said about her bein' cross with strangers, but she looked at me out of her big eyes, so wistful, and purred 'Please' so lonesome-like, that afore I knowed it, I 'd opened the door and she was scamperin' about me."

She paused and tried to catch Dorkin's eye, but his head was averted.

"And what then, Willow?" he asked.

"Well," laughed the girl, "she did n't seem to want to leave her cage, after all, so I looked inside to find out the reason, and there on a pile of straw I saw her fluffy little kittens. She purred to them to come out, but I guess they was too sleepy; anyway, they did n't come. She looked at me and then she looked at her kittens. It seemed to me as though she was invitin' me to go inside and make a fuss over 'em, so I went."

"You went into Lulu's cage?" exclaimed Dorkin. "Willow, you must be dreaming!"

"No, I ain't dreamin'," she protested. "I went in there and I laid down beside the kittens and they woke up and played with me. Oh, we had such a good play together, Dorkin! All the time I was in there, old Lulu sat outside the cage and purred as though she enjoyed it."

Dorkin was silent. He looked at the gaunt, grey animal crouched on the sward at his feet, and then his eyes sought the girl's face.

"Willow," he said gravely, "I am going to tell you something, and I want you to pay close attention to what I say. You must never go near Lulu again, unless I am with you. She is a bad old cat, in some ways, and takes ugly streaks. You can't trust her. Once, I had to fight her off; she wanted to tear me to pieces because I made a fuss over a jolly little cub bear. Another time, she crept through a window in Pete's cabin, and would have killed his wife had she not barricaded herself behind a bedroom door."

The girl was watching the motionless cat with big, wondering eyes. "Well, I'll be —" She checked herself quickly and turned away, the red flushing her cheeks.

"So you see," Dorkin went on, trying hard to suppress a smile, "it is n't safe for you to go near Lulu, alone. She surely is a cantankerous old girl; she even gets ugly with me, and I believe she is fond of me too. She hates Pete, I think, perhaps because he fears her. I have to handle her pretty well all by myself. It is more than a revelation to me to find her on friendly terms with you, Willow."

"It's 'cause I like her, and am not scared of her, likely," said the girl. "I like her a lot better than the cub bears, Dorkin."

"Play with the cub bears all you please, Willow," said Dorkin, "they and the fawns and the raccoons — all except old Ringdo, who is a vicious old tree-climber if there ever was one. Then there are the

young foxes. They are playful, friendly little fellows and will learn to love you heaps, girlie."

Willow's heavy brows arched in a little frown; she puckered up her red lips and whistled the bar of a tune.

Dorkin watched her. Surely this child of the forest was an enigma. He began to realize that he had taken on a much heavier contract than he had at first supposed.

He came out of his musings with a start. Willow had asked him a question, asked it in her direct way, her grey eyes looking straight into his.

"Who was that beautiful girl you were with, yesterday?"

"Beautiful girl?" he stammered, and laughed at his own confusion.

"She was here, her and an old man, here with Pa Washburn, from Lookup. She had hair like gold adder-tongues, her eyes were blue as a cedar-bird's egg; I saw 'em, Dorkin. Who was she?" she insisted.

Dorkin patted the brown hand resting on his arm. "Why, that was Miss Marsh," he answered. "The elderly gentleman was her uncle. I wanted you to meet them, but you were nowhere to be found. She seemed a splendid sort of girl, Willow," he added enthusiastically.

Willow stood up, and turned towards the house. Lulu and her family had gone back to the kennels.

Dorkin too arose. "Willow," he said, and paused, as she turned fiercely upon him.

"Why does she want to come up here?" she cried, — "her with her yellow curls and her white skin. Oh, I knowed somebody like her would come some day — come here and find you, Dorkin." Her voice broke in a little sob. "I wish," she said wistfully, "I wish to God she had n't come. Oh, I do Dorkin, I do!"

Dorkin stood paralyzed before this new outbreak. Uncomprehending its real cause, he could but grope for understanding.

For the first time he began to realize that this woods-girl was feeling the world-old heritage of the forest, that she had bridged the brief span between childhood and womanhood. He knew the wilderness and its ways. The new comprehension overwhelmed him, shocked him into stupidity.

He knew that she was looking at him, but it was ages before the film passed from his eyes and he could see. He noted then that her face was drawn, as though in pain, that a strange wanness had crept into it, and that the deep eyes bore the look of a hurt thing. Below the white throat, the doeskin rose and fell like the tiny waves of a storm-racked lake. He knew that she was waiting — waiting for what?

He wanted to speak, to say something, anything, so long as he relieved the situation, but he could not. He knew that the color had fled from

his face just as it had from hers. He realized that he had lost something, dear and tender and innocent. What had he found?

Above, around, deep from the tangled forest rang the fluted note upon which all the harmony and love of the shagland vastness hung: the note of mate to mate. It was the irrevocable chord that kept the shadowed world of wood and water and fathomless mysteries on its course.

He raised his arms and his hands grasped the low-hanging branch of a tree. Its cool, rough bark felt good to them. There was a fever in his blood, a wild, lawless surging in his breast. Something, a subtle perfume, indefinable as the rosy lining of a dream, overpowered the scents of leaf and blossom, and crept deep into his innermost soul. Then it passed, and he stood before her with white, set face.

She came over to him, a smile on her lips. Her eyes were dark with wistfulness. She stood on tiptoe and put her warm arms about his neck; she drew his face down and held it close against her own. "My man," she whispered, "my strong man."

He drew her to him, then crushed her close, knowing that he hurt her, expecting that she would cry out; but she was silent.

Suddenly, he found himself holding her at arm's length, talking to her in a rambling fashion, telling her what she must do. She was not to say or do such things again. She was not to remember any-

thing that had happened — She was not to see him alone again. This — this thing that had happened was but a dream — a dream — she was to remember it as only a dream.

And then he pushed her roughly from him. She stumbled and almost fell, but in the face turned to his, as she stood swaying uncertainly for the moment, there rested a light such as never had drifted down from tinted skies or swept the twilight waters of the shagland.

"You," she said, — and stopped with a little catch in her breath, — and then, defiantly, — "you are *my* man, Dorkin, my beautiful man! If she — if any woman tries to steal you from me —" She lifted her arms high, and the glint of her deep eyes recalled to his mind the sombre fire he had seen flash in those of the lynx. Once again he felt that subtle, overpowering force of the elemental grip and stifle him. He turned abruptly and stumbled through the thicket of maples, in his ears the music of her soft laughter. For an hour he wandered along the shadowed trail, unseeing, thinking, thinking, asking himself over and over again this question, "Why — oh, why?"

At last he sank wearily down on the edge of a little lake, locked in the green arm of dwarfed tamaracks, and above which hung the weaving mists lined with the mauve lights of morning. In its placid depths were mirrored tiny flecks of summer cloud, and over all hung the breath of wood and

flower. Beautiful, sublime, untroubled, it snuggled there, like a white pearl on the throat of Nature, created by God for a purpose, just as he and all his forest kindred had been created for a purpose. Looking upon it, he asked again, "Why, oh, why?"

And then he had his answer. All about him life awoke and the answer was trilled to him from throat of flashing song-bird and twittering grouse. Just across the lake, the bushes parted, and a young doe stepped from the shadows to touch the water with velvety lips. A moment later a young buck deer joined her. As he watched them, the buck reached forward and touched his mate's long ears with his nose. A gaudily dressed little wood-drake flashed above the water to alight in a dead tree, hanging close to the surface of the lake. Dorkin's gaze followed him. In a hollow of the tree his eyes discerned, through the partial gloom, a little brown something, which, as he watched, grew into animation. It was the wood-drake's small mate. She had warmed the blue-white eggs of their nest while her brilliant mate had fed. Now she, with a little quack of welcome, fluttered from the nest and sped high and outward to the distant feeding-ground. The little drake settled down on the nest. It was mate and mate, the old law of the wooded universe.

Close beside him a pair of muskrats swam from the reed-studded shallows out into the open water. He knew that somewhere back in the rushes stood

their dome-like house of grass and twig; no doubt their five blind babies were sleeping in one of the little compartments of that home.

No need to ask himself the question, "Why, oh, why?" He passed back along the trail. Slowly he walked, pondering deeply, striving blindly for some solution — there was but one. She must go away. "Great God!" he said aloud, "she is but a child." And then as quickly came another thought. He stopped in his tracks, the blood burning his cheeks with the shame of self-contempt. What had he become for the fraction of a minute, what had he become?

His head swam and his nerves cried aloud for something — what?

Mechanically his right hand swept to his jacket pocket, and with the action, realization came to him.

For an instant the old hellish craving for false courage and relief all but overpowered him, — he wanted the needle, — God, how he longed for the drug that had murdered his first hopes in life!

He leaned against a tree, and stood trembling, with closed eyes, fighting.

Then something brushed against him, and a soft, purring sound brought him back from the edge of the vortex. He sank to his knees and drew the fierce-eyed lynx to his breast, and held her there. She licked his face — damp now with the tears of self-pity and reproach — with her rough

tongue. She laid her round head on his shoulder, purring hoarsely her love for him.

He was, perhaps, the one elemental being who was capable of drawing affection from her hot heart. From a kitten he had shielded and protected her, had romped with her, fed her, housed her. Her wild heart reached for him. She loved him. If she ever killed him, it would be for love of him.

And so he held her until, gradually, the crying craving passed and the bird's song swam above the torturing voices of the fiends, and in his heart came once again the old-time strength. But he was weak from the battle, and when he arose, it was with lagging steps that he passed along the scented trail. Close beside him, her head in his hand, stalked the fierce-eyed animal that had sought him to lead him back.

## CHAPTER XVI

During the days which followed, Willow studiously avoided Dorkin. If he wondered at all, he gave no sign. Perhaps it was just as well, he reasoned. He wanted time in which to regain his poise. Never again must he allow his heart to flame into that wild outlawry which overthrew reason and made him, in his own eyes, a thing debased and unworthy of a dead father's trust. But in the summer nights following tireless trekking through his far-reaching domain, in search of manifestations of his enemies' vandalism, he lay awake thinking; and when he fell asleep he saw her, a slender wisp of a girl, gazing at him with eyes that called and allured.

He missed her in those hazy, scented twilights, missed the grave eyes lifted to his, the brown hands caressing the old violin, missed the voice whose cadence was as soft as the zephyrs born in the pockets of her native forest. He wanted her to remain always as she was now, he told himself; he wished her simple joys and pleasures might never know the unrest which comes of seeking after knowledge.

It was easy for him to reason so, as he sat alone at evening beneath the wild-hop vine, the big grey lynx at his feet, gazing up at him from amber,

trusting eyes; easy for him, a man of twenty-six, to assume the part of foster father to a girl of eighteen. If only afterward, as he lay sleepless, — shut away from the low stars and the night scents, — that unutterable longing did not come to haunt him.

During the day there was enough to hold his mind away from haunting things — things intangible, unreal, unforbidden.

Edna Marsh and her uncle had accepted his invitation to spend a couple of weeks at Hardwoods Retreat. The companionship between him and the girl from his other world had been more than pleasant during the brief periods that they spent together. He missed Edna, too, — but not as he missed Willow.

He had found many proofs of his enemies' hatred throughout his Preserve; wild mothers wantonly murdered and their young dead through starvation; the beaver dam broken; the wire fence about the enclosure cut to allow the wolves to enter; many such evidences of the enmity of Dalton and his confederates.

But not once did he or LaPeer so much as catch a glimpse of the vandals. They were too cunning to be seen. Undoubtedly, they chose the night in which to work their persecutions, which, Dorkin conjectured truly, were but the forerunners of what they contemplated doing.

Their objective, he reasoned, was the Inner Pre-

serve, the place in which were kept those splendid specimens until ready for shipment to outside points, and this they were bound to strike, sooner or later.

For the first time since he had given the wild things his protection, he felt something like fear for his children. If those men chose to raid his Preserve, they were strong enough to effect their purpose. Dalton's followers alone numbered some twenty lawless men, and there were others who would come in with them if they were needed.

And against this number he could perhaps recruit half a dozen, loyal and true enough to stand foot and foot with him and fight the invaders. If only Sagawa would return, he thought, Sagawa, the powerful Algonquin, who was a host within himself and feared by every man of the Dalton ilk, then the fight might prove less uneven. But Sagawa was still out on the red trail. There was no telling when that trail might end, or how.

To-night, as he sat on the block, beneath the wild-hop vine, the voices of his wild kindred came to his ears through the still summer air, low, softly modulated, bespeaking serenity and peace, and his heart grew heavy with an oppression he could not shake off.

He arose, at length, and followed the path to the lake. As he passed Lulu's cage, she gave a purring cry and lifted her yellow muzzle through the bars. He stroked her bewhiskered cheek, and

the big cat licked his hand with her rough tongue. Plainly, she was begging him to allow her to accompany him, as she often did in his night rambles.

He hesitated, almost of the mind to turn a deaf ear to her pleading, but finally her hoarse purring won him. First making sure that the kittens were asleep, he let down the bars, and the great lynx bounded out and rolled at his feet. Then they passed down the path, the man walking slowly with bowed head, the lynx stalking silently after.

There was no moon, but the big stars hung low above the lake spraying its face with blue-white, misty light, and lifting the willow clumps along its shore into giant distortions, which cast huge shadows across the water.

Dorkin seated himself on a log and gazed across at the tree-studded shore, opposite, a great, arched jaw cutting with spiked teeth the lifting and falling aurora borealis of the northern skies, and gradually from his soul was drawn all disquietude and depression. The That, which had drawn him to the solitude of space and had remade him, was over all, strong, calm, powerful to protect him and his.

When he arose to seek once more the path to the cabin, the dew mists were glittering on fern and leaf; a slender disc of a moon was lifting above the tamaracks, eastward. The old lynx had gone back to her kittens.

As he turned towards the path, from a thick

copse along shore, some fifty yards distant, there leaped a streak of yellow flame, and the sharp crack of two rifles fired together awoke a hundred echoes. Dorkin felt the hiss of a bullet above his head. As he sprang for the safety of the forest, he heard the quick "tack-tack" of a lighter rifle again, and glimpsed one of two dim forms speeding outward in a canoe, pitch forward.

With a low cry he leaped across the intervening space. The canoe was rounding a small island in the lake, evidently making for the farther shore.

Dorkin glanced quickly, searchingly, about him. "Willow," he called, "Willow, where are you?"

"I'm here, Dorkin, here close beside you."

He turned, and saw her standing straight and tall among the white poplars. There was sufficient light for him to mark the wanness of her cheeks and the deep fire in her big eyes.

"Willow," he said again, and paused, his utterance stemmed by the revelation of the girl's superb courage and simple loyalty. Gloriously beautiful she was, a wild thing fitting perfectly its wild environment, slender form tense, a veritable power of poise, passion, destruction.

She threw the empty shell from her little rifle and levered another into the chamber. Then she stepped to his side and laid her brown hand on his arm.

"They did n't aim to get you yet, Dorkin," she said. "They only wanted you to know they were

able to get you any time, I guess. I've been watchin' them for more'n an hour. They were hidin' behind them bushes when you came down to the shore. It was Dalton's man, Gregg, an' I did n't see the other man's face. His back was toward me. But, Dorkin, he was a big man dressed in city clothes an' he wore a wide felt hat. I heard him say to Gregg, 'If he comes down, as usual, to-night, I'll jest shoot close enough to him to let him know we're on the job, but it's not time to get him yet. I just want to worry him some.' "

Dorkin patted the hand on his arm.

"I've been waitin' here with my gun trained on them men fer a long time," the girl said wearily. "When the big man raised his rifle, I put a ball against it, just above his trigger finger, to make his shot go wild. I aimed to get him through the arm, next shot, but he twisted round so's to put Gregg between him an' me. Then, as they was makin' their get-away, I got Gregg through the shoulder. I'll get him lower down next time. Oh," in answer to the man's look of wonder, "it was easy shootin', Dorkin. They were close an' the light was good; besides, my gun's got ivory sights — I could n't miss."

Dorkin, the girl's hand gripped in his, sought the trail to the cabin. He was too much the victim of conflicting emotions to speak, and Willow had lapsed into one of her moods of silence.

He bade her good-night, at LaPeer's cabin, and

passed on to his own, slowly, head bowed in thought. Then he remembered that he had neglected to put up the bars on Lulu's cage; so he went on down the path. The big cat was home safe, stretched out, suckling her kittens.

Dorkin secured the bars of the cage and turned back towards the cabin. He had had a heavy day's tramp through his lower dominion, and was tired. As he came to the glade, he found Willow waiting for him under the wild-honeysuckle vine.

"Are you goin' to bed now, Dorkin?" she asked, as he came up, "or are you goin' to keep on prowlin' around all night?"

"Why, Willow," he laughed, "it's you who should be in bed."

She leaned her rifle against a tree and stood up straight, arms folded across her breast. "I won't go to bed so long as I think you're liable to be runnin' plum inter danger," she informed him.

He glanced at her quickly, struck by a disturbing timbre in her voice, something of wistfulness, something of hopelessness which grew into the ghost of a sob as she said abruptly, —

"If you'll say you'll go in — I'll be gettin' back, now, Dorkin."

He roused himself. "I promise, little Willow, the Wisp," he said, striving hard to assume the old bantering tones of other days. Then, suddenly, his face grew grave and his eyes misty. That world of solitude, of which they were a part, was a world

of reality, a world in which artifice had no place. So that the smile upon the wan face she turned to him failed to hide the heartache behind it.

He drew her close to him, and lifted her face so that he might read all that lay written there. But the eyes were hidden beneath long lashes, and only the tremor of the still-smiling lips told him of a feeling she had bravely striven to conceal.

"Little girl," he asked gently, "what is it?"

She was silent.

"Tell me, Willow; why have you avoided me for so many days? Why have you not been near to boss me and play for me on your violin, as you used to?"

"I have been near you, Dorkin," she answered, "only — you did n't know it. Every day as you trekked through the forest of the lower Preserve, I've been close to you — You see," she broke off wearily, "you're such a — you're so foolish, Dorkin, you won't carry a rifle. I was scared some of *them* might get you. So I've trailed along."

He sighed, and, with an effort, let his arms fall to his sides. A whip-poor-will from leafy copse, close at hand, sent its musical call out on the night. Far off another fluted call answered it. It was the world-old note of the solitude, the call of mate to mate.

"Willow, the Wisp," he said hoarsely, and held out his arms.

But she was gone, speeding like a beam of star-

light across the glade, to the cabin beneath the trailing honeysuckles.

Dorkin was up at daybreak, but not before Mrs. LaPeer, who had his breakfast ready for him on his return from his morning plunge in the lake. There was work to be done, fences to mend down in the lower portion of the Preserve, and he had asked Pete to remain close to the inner enclosure in order to keep an eye on the animals there.

As he rose from the breakfast table, he said to his housekeeper, "Please tell Willow that I am taking my rifle, Mrs. LaPeer, and that I would like her to separate the cock birds from the hens, in the older partridge broods. They're getting big enough to fight, and strong enough to injure each other."

The woman smiled, showing two rows of perfect teeth. "Dat will be job to suit Willow, fer sure," she said. "She lak dat kind of work, her."

Dorkin picked up his hat and opened the rifle-case in the wall. He frowned, as he lifted down a beautiful little repeating rifle, and absently filled its magazine with cartridges. On principle, he hated rifles, because they were destroying agents, and life to him was something which should be protected and not taken lightly.

But Willow had said he was a — qualified fool, and he put a great deal of dependence in what she said, always.

The fact that he went armed would, at least, put her fears concerning his safety at rest.

The mosses and ferns were dripping dew, as he followed the trail to the lower Preserve. Above, and eastward, the skies were shot with the colors of morning, and far across the sloping valleys Old Creation Hills lifted frowsy tips to catch those rainbow tints.

It was hard to believe that into this place of fastness, and silence, and peace, had come a menace which must be met if its harmony was to be kept unbroken. But well Dorkin knew that he had enemies who intended to destroy, if possible, that which he had wrought with such loving labor. And he believed they would make, sooner or later, a united effort towards this end. Well, all he could do against the raiders was to fight, and he would at least do that.

As he turned a bend in the trail, he saw Pa Washburn approaching from the opposite direction. The settler's greeting lacked its old-time cheer. Dorkin could see that something was amiss with his old friend.

"Dorkin," said Washburn, leaning his long muzzle-loading rifle against a tree, "I was jest on my way up ter see you. Things ain't jest right down in Lookup, no more than they be up here, I guess." The blue eyes looked pleadingly into Dorkin's. "I wanted to ast ye if you've noticed anythin' strange in my conduct, lately?"

"Why," commenced Dorkin, in a puzzled tone, "I just don't — "

"What I mean," said Washburn eagerly, "is thar anythin' about me to make you suspect my mind ain't jest right? Damn it all," he blurted, "in plain English, you don't think I be crazy, do ye?"

"Why, certainly not, Pop," Dorkin assured him.

"Wall, I'm beginnin' to have my doubts 'bout that," sighed the settler. "I take it that when a feller gets ter seein' things what ain't really thar, his mind ain't what you'd call exactly sound, an' by the flat-tailed beaver!" he cried, wiping his face on his sleeve, "I've been seein' 'em, I sure have been seein' things, Dorkin."

"Just what, for instance, Pop?"

"Wall, fer one thing, I've seen the same feller in two different places at almos' the same time. That Timberley chap, it was. I'm right down sartin that thinkin' 'bout that sneak has unseated my reason. It was n't only once it happened, either, but three or four times, by Harry! Why, only yesteddy, when I was drivin' up ter the station, I saw him, plain as the nose on yer face. He was fishin', down at White Forks. Had his back towards me, but I'd know them tweed clothes an' that wide hat anywheres.

"I was so tarnation mad that I scared old Moll and Bess inter a canter, an' we went fer about three mile hell-bent-fer-election. We dished a wheel

cuttin' round a curve, an' I had ter get out so's to fix it. An', Dorkin, so help me Moses, if standin' on a hill, in a bare spot on the upper trail, *was n't that same Timberley!*"

He paused to gaze anxiously up into Dorkin's face. "Now, then," he cried, "am I crazy er not? If I'm not, how do you 'count fer him bein' in two different spots at the same time?"

Dorkin cast a quick glance at his old friend. His eyes did look a little wild, he thought.

"Simply an hallucination, Pop," he comforted. "Lots of people have them. Undoubtedly, you've been worrying too much about him, so you must quit it. He has a most disagreeable way of making one know he's about, but he is simply riding for a fall. Just leave Timberley to me, Pop."

He slapped the settler's shoulder so hard that he winced. "Now, what else?" he questioned.

Washburn leaned against a tree and drew forth his corn-cob pipe. He lit it deliberately, his seamed face grave, his blue eyes troubled.

"That leetle gal, Dorkin," he said soberly, "Miss Marsh, I mean, — she's actin' queer. She's lost her appetite an' the roses in her cheeks are fadin'. Lord Harry, think of a person losin' their appetite up here! And often her eyes are red like she 'd been cryin'. What the deuce is the matter, d' ye s'pose?"

Dorkin's face grew grave. He believed he knew what was the matter, but he did not attempt to enlighten Pa Washburn.

"An' then there's her uncle," continued the settler. "He's got to actin' queer, too. Often when everybody's in bed, an' supposed ter be asleep, I hear him slippin' outside inter the woods. Almos' every night this happens. I'm a light sleeper, an' I hear him. Once I was gettin' up ter foller him, thinkin' he was maybe one of them sleep-walkers an' likely to walk off the shore inter the lake an' get drowned, but Ma she heered me an' made me get back inter bed ag'in. I had ter fib till I sweat, in order to satisfy her that I did n't have walkin' nightmare. Now, by thunder!" he ended dolefully, "is it any wonder that I am a leetle teched in the head?"

"Miss Marsh is likely worried about her uncle's health, and this affects her spirits," said Dorkin; "and the uncle is the victim of an acute nervous disorder, and goes out this way because he is unable to compose his mind to sleep. You must n't let it bother you, Pop," he admonished. "I want you to get your nerve back if you are coming in to work over Hardwoods Preserve with me this morning."

"By ginger, that's what I'd like to do right now," cried Washburn, his old spirits returning. "My boy, Tom, is home with a sprained knee he got fightin' a bush fire up in the Divide. He kin look arter my work at the mill ter-day. How's that fer high, Dorkin, boy?"

Dorkin wrung his horny hand. "You've always stood by me, Pop," he said. "I'm awfully glad to

have you. But," he cautioned, "I want you to look out for yourself and not get hurt. The gang is drawing closer in on us and getting more fearless all the time. You may be jumping right into dangerous ground. Have you thought it all out?"

"You bet ye," grinned Washburn, "and, by gracious, I've got old Nancy Muzzle-loader, here, cleaned up and sighted so fine I bet I kin cut thet wart offin Abe Dalton's nose at a hundred yards, clean."

"You'll do," laughed Dorkin. "Come along, then. Let's see what depredations that gentleman and his followers have committed during the past night."

# CHAPTER XVII

MAN may shatter its life and bend it to his will, but never may he hope to decipher the mystery of the wilderness — that Something which holds God's solitude in its allotted groove, and speeds it forward and on with a whisper of promise heard and understood only of the wild children, whose lives are a part of its sublime harmony.

On the shore of a small lake stood Sagawa, the Algonquin, his sombre gaze fastened on the dim, tree-spiked horizon, etched like a grey line against the background of crimson. Immovable as the drab rock obtruding from the lake's placid surface, he stood, watching the bars of sunset being lifted from the skies by the misty hand of Manitou.

When the last tinge faded into dusk, he turned slowly towards the forest. All day the poplars had whispered uneasily, all day the firs had trailed their oily spikes disconsolately. The notes of the forest day-lovers had grown hushed throughout the late afternoon. The mysterious Guardian Spirit of the solitudes had whispered a warning of storm.

Well did the Indian know that storm would come that night, with tearing wind and driving rain and destroying lightning, a storm such as only that wild North country knew; but little he cared, for in his hot heart a greater storm was raging — had

raged for long days and nights, as he held to the red trail, the end of which was not yet in sight.

And to-night, as he had done every night in the hush of twilight, he paused on the edge of the forest to lift his arms towards the skies and speak his promise anew to the spirit of his white brother.

Night fell, black and silent, unpierced by a single star. In his skin tepee, stretched before a tiny blue smudge to bar out the swarming mosquitoes, Sagawa lay on his bed of spruce-boughs, waiting, as waited the world of lake and forest, for the unleashing of the storm-hounds.

Silence and darkness deepened; the air grew heavy and oppressive. Then, far-off, sounded the first rumbling baying of the pack. A shaft of lightning split the inky skies, to show in the livid scar of its course the lake trembling in the first wild clutch of storm. All about, the trees shivered and complained; but the Indian's steadfast eyes gazed beyond the world of travail to a far-off upland, where the trail had first beckoned him, the long red trail which he had followed in vain.

There was but one man, so the Algonquin reasoned, with sufficient hatred in his heart to shoot Daddy Farney down in cold blood. That man was White Hawk, and him he was seeking. But like the fox, who matches cunning with cunning, White Hawk, possessing in like degree Sagawa's craft of forest and stream, had managed to outwit his pursuer. Once, too, by way of warning that there

was danger in too closely pressing a hunted thing, a rifle-bullet had clipped off a twig close above the Algonquin's head. From that time forward, he had redoubled his efforts to bring his quarry to earth, following with unfailing eye the tracks which the fugitive strove to cover up.

And now had come the storm, the wild, tearing storm of ripping wind and obliterating rain. When it passed nothing would be left of the track of the hunted. Only Sagawa's marvellous intuition to guess accurately the direction of his quarry, and so to pick up that track once more, remained to the man reclining before the smudge.

Above and around, the thunder crashed with booming reports which echoed from rock to rock, rumbling outward and on, to be lost in heavier detonations from the lightning-licked heavens. And over all sounded the torrent of the rain, and the wail of tempest lashing the face of the lake to foam-capped waves. Occasionally, the duller crash of a fire-girdled tree, overthrown by the gale, broke through the wild cadence of the storm, or a tongue of fire licked a livid spiral down some giant monarch of the forest, as the forked lightning found it.

But all of this the Indian marked but impassively, as he waited for the storm to spend itself. Wilder shrieked the wind, louder crashed the thunder, and darting fingers of fire adown the low-hanging clouds illumined the night-world solitude with blue-white, wavering light.

Then, suddenly, above all other sounds, came one which sent an icy chill to Sagawa's heart. Involuntarily he clutched at the tiny iron cross beneath his buckskin shirt, and lifted his rifle. A wail, almost human in its note, wavering, shrill, had floated down on the wings of the wind.

With a single movement the Indian sprang up and leaped outside in the driving rain, facing the direction from which had come that dreaded cry. Near by, the lightning claimed a great, high-standing tree, its crash of exhilaration drowning — for the instant — all other sounds. But the Algonquin's eyes strayed not for a second from the headland one hundred yards distant, sprayed now with the blue-white light of the zigzagging arrows of the storm.

And, as he watched, there sprang from the forest, and leaped across the headland, a number of great, gaunt creatures with lowered heads and lolling tongues. *And the leader of the wolf pack was white as snow.*

Another instant, and they were gone; only from the waste of the opposite forest came that wild, fluted cry of the white leader. And all unconscious of the driving rain and tearing wind, the Algonquin stood, his head sunk on his breast. Once again the white wolf had crossed his trail. Another brother was in danger. He must leave, for the time, vengeance of the dead, that he might lend his aid to the living.

Once again, crouched in his skin tepee, Sagawa waited for the storm to pass. He would back-trail to the hardwoods and help his friend and brother fight off those who meant him harm. But his objective lay a day and two nights' journey through wild forest and swift "strong water." The last time the white wolf had crossed his trail, he had been too late to save his aged brother, the trapper. He must not be too late again. He would start now, and not wait for the tempest to pass.

But even as he gathered his few simple camping-utensils together, the shrieking winds grew still, the heavy rain shrank to a faint patter on the skin tepee; the voice of the thunder came angry and sullen from afar. Through the heavy blackness the lake, sighing itself to rest again, glimmered faintly. Five minutes later Sagawa was ready for the journey to the Uplands.

As he drew his canoe from the copse of cedars, the clouds above the lake rolled back, silvery-edged, to let a full moon look through. Then the Shagland was transformed to a fairy world, soft-illumined, alive, fresh with scents such as only the wilderness holds.

Nothing to bemoan the toll which the winds and lightning had taken. Where giant trees had fallen and boulders had been hurled from their foundations, other trees would, in time, be lifted up by the hands of the guardian Mother, other boulders shaped to fit the waste places. For in the world of

solitude the wail of death is never heard above the note of her grand and sublime harmony of life!

Far out on the lighting lake a loon wailed to his mate. From the frowsy forest on the water's far shore a mate-seeking fox barked; through the golden moon-mists above the lake night hawks flitted and called their plaintive notes in response to fluted whistle of copse-haunting whip-poor-wills. The world of the night solitude was awake again.

The Algonquin gazed about him, breathing deeply, and a tender light chased the lines of weariness from his face. Then, slowly, he stretched his arms towards the fathomless sky. "Great Manitou," he prayed, "finish for Sagawa the task he must leave; that he might save his brother." Then swiftly he turned, and down the lake, in the track of the moon, propelled his canoe with the swift, noiseless strokes that had earned for him the name "Water-Swallow" among his tribe. Quickly the shore on which he had pitched his wigwam sank behind him. Onward he flew, impelled by his desire to reach his friend and brother before it was too late. He had promised to come when the token was given; and the promise of an Algonquin is sacred.

On he sped, until the spikey fringe of the lake's upper shore stood up against the sky. There lay a portage of two miles, across which he must carry his canoe. After this, many hours' paddling lay before him, up the long chain of little lakes and rivers.

He beached his canoe and stepped out, his moccasined feet making not the slightest sound on the rocky shore. Then he crouched, suddenly, his sharp eyes peering through the trees. Above, and not more than a hundred yards distant from him, he had caught the glimmer of a camp-fire.

For perhaps five minutes Sagawa watched that light, then, noiselessly, he dipped into the forest and made his way towards it.

Silently he moved forward until before his view lay a tiny glade. The light of the camp-fire fell upon a tent of fair size, pitched in its centre. Brewing tea before the fire crouched a man, a half-breed, his back towards Sagawa, and on a block before the tent sat a tall, sour-visaged man, who now and again turned towards the tent as though listening. He twisted about now, as though to make some remark to his companion and evidently his guide — then his eyes opened wide and he sat erect with a jerk. "Well, I'll be damned!" he exclaimed in wonder. "Where did you spring from, Mr. Hiawatha?"

Sagawa had stepped into the firelight. He answered the other's question, his eyes on the half-breed, who had twisted about and now sat with a look of fear on his face. "I come from where the red trail beckoned me. I go where my brother calls."

"Well, you've got some little run-way, my regal friend, and I guess maybe you don't find the track crowded any." The tall man was evidently piqued at the Indian's non-committal answer to his ques-

tion. He took a chew of tobacco, munched it in his cadaverous jaws, then laughed shortly.

"By gosh, I've guessed you out, I'll bet a dollar! You're that Injun, Sagawa, ain't that right?" He stood up, and, advancing to the Indian, held out his hand. "My name's Haight," he introduced himself.

But the Algonquin did not take the hand extended to him. Pointing to the half-breed, with an imperious gesture, he said: —

"I would know why Darbo, who does the bidding of the trappers in the willow-hedged valley, is upon the trail leading to the Basin of White Water, the village of Sagawa's people? And" — turning his burning gaze on the white man — "why he has, as trail-mate, one who wishes the brother of Sagawa harm?"

"Sacré!" cried the half-breed, springing erect, lean fingers seeking the knife in his belt, "many tam you accuse Darbo of wrong, Sagawa. But no more he fears you. Neider does White Hawk, his brudder, whose trail you follow, fear you — not now."

He ceased speaking, at a motion from the white man, twisting about so as to put the fire between himself and the Indian. Haight stood, frowning, fingering the stubble of whiskers on his long chin.

"Darbo speaks the truth, for once in his life," he said, at length. "We found White Hawk an hour ago, after the storm. He was pinned under a

wind-thrown tree. He's in the tent there, what's left of him."

With a guttural cry Sagawa sprang towards the tent's entrance; but Darbo, lips drawn back from his teeth, snarled him back, with uplifted knife.

The Indian paused, and his eyes rested contemptuously on the half-breed, as he addressed him.

"Is Sagawa then a starving wolf that would feed on the broken body of the quarry he has followed, that the brother of White Hawk fears to let him see for himself if he has heard truth? Listen, then, Darbo. Sagawa has followed the red trail in the track of White Hawk for long, because White Hawk took the life of Sagawa's aged brother. Good. To-night, in the track of the storm, the white wolf crossed Sagawa's trail once again, and because he must seek the upland of hardwoods without sleep or rest, Sagawa spoke to the Mighty Manitou a prayer to finish for him the work He had pointed out to him to do. But because there is that which White Hawk would speak in secret to Sagawa, Sagawa must be allowed a little time alone with him before his spirit is gone."

He tossed his knife and rifle at the half-breed's feet, and, pushing him gently aside, stooped and entered the tent.

Haight, his hands deep in his pockets, swore softly. "Put up that knife, you fool," he ordered Darbo. "You'd be afraid to use it on that big Injun, even although you was sure his tribe would n't

cut you into shoe-strings, and you know it. It's barely possible that he knows what he's talking about. Anyway, for my part, I'm wanting as much of that Algonquin's good-will as I can pack, seein' as I've got a lot of hob-nobbing to do among his people. From what I've learned of that White Hawk, something sudden was coming to him, anyhow."

Darbo, his swarthy face drawn in malignant hate, slowly sheathed his knife, and moved a little closer to Haight. "White Hawk's back is crushed, and he will die," he said bitterly. "And, sacré! jus' because dat Sagawa is cheated, he say Great Spirit do it all for heem, — hell!"

Haight seated himself on the block again and lit his pipe.

"If I ever get out of this damnable woods, without being killed or driven crazy by you and your like, Darbo," he growled, "I faithfully swear to forever after hold to the world of civilized human beings. You're crazy; that Algonquin's crazy; everybody's crazy, even that damned fool Timberley." He turned slowly towards the sulking half-breed, "Well, why don't you say something? What the devil am I paying you for?"

"Ba Gar, den, I will say somet'ing," flashed Darbo. "I will say dat you also are crazee. And how you lak dat, eh?"

"Well, I like it well enough to express my appreciation of the second real truth I ever heard you

utter, my amiable friend. I *am* crazy, there's not a doubt of it. If I was n't, do you suppose I'd be risking my life on these hellish trails on account of a fool sentiment for a fellow who does n't care the smallest kind of a — But hold on! I know he does care, and, Darbo, if I find what you have told me is correct, and we can get proofs, up in the Basin of White Water, I'll make it all right for you. Ah —"

Sagawa had stepped from the tent, and stood fair in the firelight. In his fingers he held a small iron crucifix. His eyes, burning no longer, but filled now with a glow that made his lean face tender and beautiful, sought first those of one and then the other of his watchers.

"The spirit of White Hawk will soon seek the last long trail," he said impressively. "He and Sagawa have spoken together. White Hawk has said that which Sagawa waited to hear.

"Once when the wigwams of his people were as many as the gulls above the face of the Basin of White Water, Sagawa and White Hawk were little brothers together. Together they roamed the forest paths and hunted the fleet-footed rabbits with bows and arrows, and snared the swift trout from the brooks. Then the trails which they followed forked, and White Hawk and Sagawa went their separate ways."

He paused, and stood in deep thought. Then he continued: —

"When they met again, it was not as brothers. The heart of White Hawk had changed. It was the fire-water of the traders that killed Sagawa's brother, and planted hatred where love once was. And so it was for many snows, and always Sagawa's heart longed for the little brother he had lost.

"What White Hawk has done is now remembered no longer. He has paid, and he has spoken that to Sagawa which has made his heart at peace. Look."

High above his head the Indian held the little crucifix.

"White Hawk has kissed it and said after Sagawa that which the Jesuit priest has taught him. All enmity and bitterness has been buried between them. To-night Sagawa has journeyed with his little brother, White Hawk, along an olden forest trail. He has left his little brother there. He will journey on alone until the last long trail stretches out before him. It is well."

Abruptly he ceased speaking, snatched up knife and rifle, and slipped into the forest.

For a time Haight sat, his teeth clamping his dead pipe, his eyes on the smouldering fire, close beside which the half-breed was huddled.

Then, slowly he rose, and walking to the tent, lifted its flap and looked in.

When at last he turned towards the fire again, he carried his hat in his hand. Darbo looked up questioningly.

"That big Injun was right," Haight said gently. "White Hawk has sure found his last long trail."

Like a flash the slender form of Darbo was lifted, and with a bound he was beside the tent. Frantically he lifted the flap, then stood, half crouched, gazing in on the dead form of the Indian lying on a bed of spruce boughs. As he gazed, the tallow candle, bitten by a draft from the opening, spluttered out, and Darbo, with a whispered oath, dropped the flap and staggered back into the firelight.

Twice Haight addressed him, but Darbo paid no attention. Then, suddenly, the half-breed sprang erect, terror in his eyes, and pointed towards the forest of the mainland. "Leesen!" he shuddered. "You hear it? Yes?"

Haight bent his head and listened. Faint and weirdly wild, from far away, came the howl of a wolf.

"You hear it?" Darbo repeated.

"It's nothing but a timber wolf, you fool," the other answered.

"Dat's de white wolf!" cried the half-breed and crossed himself. "Leesen, you hear heem some more? Hee's comin' dis way. Mojie, he is come fas'."

Sure enough, Haight heard the howls distinctly drawing closer. He reached for his rifle, but the half-breed, with a cry, snatched it away.

"No! No!" he cried. "You must lift no hand

against dat white wolf. It means death. Sit still and do not'ing! Sacré, but look, look!"

Down the glade, swept now by the soft light of the moon, a compact body moved, splitting into several shapes as it drew swiftly closer. The fire had filmed over and died so that only the moon illumined the glade. Then, as the wolf-pack swept closer, the leader, a great white wolf, lifted his muzzle and howled. And with a new and gripping terror in his heart, Haight covered his face with his hands and waited until another cry bespoke the pack far down the trail.

Slowly then, and with the mien of one who has received a mysterious message, Darbo turned to the white man.

"We will back-trail at once," he said. "I mus' lose no tam. I mus' get back to de Golden Highlands, soon."

"Like hell you will." Haight sprang up and stood above his guide. "You are going to finish what we set out to do, sabe?" he said, tapping the half-breed on the shoulder. "You're going to lead me to that Basin of White Water."

Darbo returned his threatening look calmly. "It is of no use to go dere now," he said. "What you would learn at Basin of White Water, you can learn better by going back from where we started. You t'ink I lie, but you are wrong. Dis tam, I swear I spak truf. Before, I lie to you, yes. I tell you a leetle of somet'ing which happen eighteen year ago.

You say, if I tak' you to one who can tell you all, you pay me well. All right. I say, 'Yes, I will.' But I lie, me, 'bout dat. Only one man have what you would get hold of, proofs, and dat man lies now in dat tent — dead. Now, I will bury White Hawk, den we will strike camp and back-trail."

Haight stood chewing hard on his pipe and thinking.

"Well, of all the crooked, measly, little no-breed lice on earth," he burst out, "you are certainly the worst! Of course," ruefully, "I'll have to go with you, 'cause I'd get lost without you. If I killed you, as you richly deserve, it would amount to the same thing. Now you try to salve it over by saying I'll learn what I want to know back where we started from; you liar!"

He gave the half-breed a shake that fairly made his teeth rattle.

"Look you," cried Darbo, "if I spak not de truf, you pay me not'ing. Ees it not fair?"

Haight stood, scratching his head and pondering. Darbo looked at him, searching his soul with his small eyes.

Then he said: "I have somet'ing else to say to you, an' when I say it, you will lose no tam. You will want to fly back to dat udder place, yes. Leesen, den, you."

For five minutes Haight stood, listening to the whispered words of the half-breed. Slowly, as he

listened, his blue eyes opened wide, and once his cadaverous jaws opened to explode an oath.

When Darbo had finished, he gripped him by the wrist, "Is that all true?" he gasped, — "true?"

"If I lie, may de white wolf tear me to pieces," answered the half-breed. "You change your min', I guess? You would go back now, yes?"

"Darbo," shouted Haight, "we'll bury your brother, and we'll keep going night and day till we get there. Good God!" he shivered. "What if we are too late!"

For the next hour there was no word spoken between them. In the cavity, made by the uprooting of a storm-cast tree, they buried the dead White Hawk. Then they packed their utensils and struck the trail for the lake. It was not until they were out on the water, silvery grey now beneath the rays of the sinking moon, that Haight turned back towards his guide.

"Darbo," he said, "you're not doing all this for me. You've got some work of your own to do back there. What is it?"

Darbo's face twisted in a grin of fiendish hate. "Yes, I have some leetle t'ing to do up dere, me," he said softly. "Dere one feller, nam' Dalton, who whip me wit' stick, lak I was drunk Esquimo. I go back, ma frien', to keel heem. Dat's all."

# CHAPTER XVIII

THAT subtle warning which was whispered throughout the millions of acres of lake-shot forest, stretching from the foot of Old Creation to the Basin of White Water, was whispered also to the Hardwoods sanctuary. Willow Farney had been the first to sense it, as she and Dorkin were returning up the path from Wild Duck Lake, to the cabin in the late afternoon. The tall hickory, lifting imperious head above its fellows, had quivered her the note, and she paused, her arms about the rough trunk of the tree, eyes lifted to the blue skies above the forest.

Larry, the shaggy setter, watching, lifted his heavy muzzle and whined, and Willow called to Dorkin, who had lingered along the path to watch a covey of young partridge being marshalled by a drooping-winged mother bird.

"There's goin' to be a storm," she said, as he came up. "This old tree never lies, and it says — listen, Dorkin, to what it is sayin'. Hold your face close here to mine. Now, hear it whisperin' 'Storm, Storm'?"

Dorkin laughed and, reaching forward, drew the girl from the tree. A wisp of a brown curl entwined his finger. The warm touch of her throat against his hand sent an electric thrill through him. She

lifted startled eyes to his face. Her lips were trembling.

"Dorkin," she cried, chokingly, "you — you must n't touch me like that." Tears sprang to her eyes and she stamped her little foot angrily. "I'm not a baby, Dorkin. I'm —"

"I'm sorry, Willow; I keep forgetting." Dorkin spoke gently, and let his caressing hand fall to one of her brown, clenched ones.

"You must n't, you must n't," she repeated faintly, and gripping his hand in both of hers, carried it to her face again.

He felt her hot wet cheek against it, felt her warm lips press it; then she was standing away from him, the old grave-eyed Willow, the Wisp, of other days.

"Come, Dorkin, we've got to look after our wild things," she ordered. And as of old, he followed her up the path.

Danny and LaPeer were already at work housing the animals in the big wicker kennels when Dorkin and Willow came to the breeding-grounds. Danny was struggling to hold and discipline a frolicsome bear cub of three months, and place it in the cage from which the mother bear looked out with disinterested, sleepy eyes, the while she tenderly suckled its less-playful brother.

Dorkin took the cub from the boy, and lifted it, pawing and kicking, into the air. There it hung suspended, clawing and whimpering, and in cub-

language, promising to be good. Dorkin gave it a playful shake and set it down on the sward. He slapped his hands sharply together and the fat little fellow scampered into the enclosure. The first act of the mother bear, who had no doubt watched the proceedings with disapproval, was to hit the roguish cub a swat on the ear which sent it sprawling.

"Oh, Dorkin, look at the cute little thing!" cried Willow. "See, he's settin' up an' beggin' for forgiveness."

"He's a little hypocrite, Willow," laughed the keeper. "He gives us more trouble than all the other cubs together. Are the foxes all right, Pete?" he asked, turning to his helper.

"All but dat ole silver-grey, Spray-Coat," La-Peer answered. "I ain't been able to find dat old fox."

The Frenchman looked troubled. "I was comin' to tell you bout dat," he added. "Spray-Coat ain't been near her puppies all night. Dey was crying wit' hungry when I look in, not long ago."

Dorkin's face grew serious. "Something must have happened to her," he said anxiously. "Come, Danny, we'll take Larry and see if we can find her. Want to come, Willow?"

The girl shook her head. "I'll help Pete house the rest of the animals," she said. "And — Dorkin?"

Impressed by the odd note in her voice, he turned, and came over to her. "Yes, Willow?"

"I want you to be keerful," she admonished. "I'm afraid for you, Dorkin."

"Nonsense, girlie," he laughed. "Afraid of what?"

She was silent.

"Tell me," he insisted gently. "What are you afraid of?"

"Abe Dalton, fer one thing," she answered "and" — she hesitated.

"And somebody else, Willow?"

"Yes, that man Timberley. Oh, he is here, Dorkin," as the keeper's brows contracted. "I saw him. I saw him — yesterday."

Dorkin stood, in perplexed thought; she reached out and touched his arm gently.

He shook off his unpleasant reflections, and lifting her hand patted it commendingly. "Good, true little friend," he said. "I don't know what I would do without you, Willow, the Wisp."

She gazed at him, unhearing.

"Timberley said that he'd even things with you; you know that?"

"Yes, I know that."

"Well — if — if anything has happened to Spray-Coat, — she's the most valuable animal here, you say, — if anything has happened to her —?"

Dorkin nodded. Already a suspicion had entered his mind. That Willow had felt the same suspicion strengthened it to almost a conviction.

"I'll lose no time in finding out, Willow," he told her, "and" — he smiled, — "I'll take my rifle."

The girl caught her breath quickly. "That's what I was goin' to ask you to do, Dorkin. An' — you'll be right watchful, won't you?"

"I'll be watchful, Willow. Now I must go."

He turned away in the track of Danny. Willow stood watching until he joined her brother, then she turned towards the kennel, where LaPeer was busy housing the little wild folk.

A pair of ring-tailed raccoons were protesting against being shut away from the open sunlight, and were being cautioned to behave by the Frenchman, as Willow came up.

"Dat hard work," he grinned. "Sometam it make me laugh, sometam swear. Dem little feller dey lak me pretty well, I guess so, but when I go put dem in pen, dey scratch and sometam bite."

"Pete," said Willow soberly, "you told me once that you could shoot holes through the leaves, as they fell from the trees!"

"Yes, Willow-de-Wisp, I remember."

"Well, somethin' tells me that we must watch — must watch over Dorkin," she finished quickly. "He's so strong, so good, he thinks all other men are also strong and good. Don't you see? Don't you?" Her voice was high-pitched and quavering.

"Yes, dat is so." LaPeer frowned and shifted uneasily. "You are right, Willow-de-Wisp."

"Then you will watch, won't you?"

The Frenchman shrugged his shoulders. "All de tam I will watch," he promised.

"Thanks, Pete," she smiled gratefully; "an' now, if you'll go an' house the animals on the lower Ridge, I'll tend to the rest of these," she offered.

"But dat old lynx, Lulu, she mus' be fasten' up," he told her. "Dat big cat is ugly sometam. You will leave her for Dorkin, yes?"

"I'm not afraid of Lulu, Pete," Willow assured him. "We're good friends. Slip along now, an' don't bother none about me; I'll house her, all right."

With a shake of his head, LaPeer turned towards the work on the lower Ridge. Willow passed along, coaxing other of the wild animals into their respective kennels, and putting up the bars upon them to hold them prisoners until the storm had passed.

It was late afternoon before her task was finished. All the birds and animals of the upper Ridge had been safely and securely housed, even to the big lynx, Lulu, who now lay close to where Willow sat, watching, long tawny body stretched out, paws working and red tongue protruding, as she purred to the nursing kittens.

Dorkin and Danny had been gone for nearly three hours. Willow was sure they had found something amiss. At last she caught sight of them returning, and springing up, ran to meet them. Dorkin was carrying the limp form of Spray-Coat in his arms. Danny ran forward, and to his sister's

quick "What is it, Danny?" cried: "It's Spray-Coat. She's been poisoned. Dorkin asked me to get some bear grease melted quick as I could. No, she is n't dead. Dorkin says it was an overdose."

He rushed on, and Willow stood, white-faced and panting, her hands clenched, her breath coming in gasps. "The damned cowards!" she cried. "The damned cowards!"

"There, there, girlie, you must n't take it that way," said Dorkin, as he came up. "They did their best to get Spray-Coat, but they were over-eager I guess. They laid poison, too much of it to accomplish their purpose. She threw it up; but she's sick, very sick, Willow. She had strayed away to die. It took us a long time to find her."

The girl held out her arms, and Dorkin placed the sick animal in them. She pressed her face against the still body, crooning to it, tears streaming down her cheeks.

"Poor little sweetheart; poor little Spray-Coat," she whispered. "An' they tried to murder her, an' let her babies starve. No, no!" she cried. "They can't, they can't do that— Oh, Dorkin!" she wailed. "She must be dead, or her dear tongue would lick my cheek. Oh, she must be dead!"

Dorkin put his arm about the girl's shoulders.

"No, she is not dead, only very, very sick, Willow," he said. "We may be able to save her yet. There, now, please give her to me. Here comes Danny with the antitode."

The girl's fingers strayed through the beautiful fur, with lingering caress, as Dorkin took the fox from her. "Had n't I best go an' bring her puppies in, Dorkin?" she asked.

"Yes, if you will, Willow. Why, look, girlie," he cried, "she is stirring. Why, she is looking straight at you — I believe she knows you."

"Oh, Dorkin!"

The girl had fallen on her knees beside the fox, now stretched on the sward. She bent down with her face close to the slender muzzle. With a spasmodic effort the sick animal lifted its head, and feebly its red tongue obtruded to give the girl the brief caress, which had been its daily token of love ever since she had come among its kindred to live.

"We must save her, Dorkin!" she cried chokingly. "An' Dorkin," — her voice changed to the hardness of steel, — "we must get them as tried to murder her, damn 'em!"

Then, springing up, she sped swiftly away, to bring the hungry puppies home.

By supper-time all the animals and birds had been kenneled and cooped, splendid specimens these which Dorkin and his helper had been careful to keep close within Hardwoods Retreat. But down throughout that five-hundred acre lower Preserve were many furred denizens which were still almost as wild as when they had crept furtively in. These, too, must learn, some day, that the big keeper of the Preserve was not a being to be feared. Every

spring Dorkin secured certain of the young of these wilder animals, and carried them into the Retreat, as he called it.

Dorkin's market for his wild things had been extended greatly. During the past two years many requests for animals had come to him from big zoos. The prices were good. Each fall shipment was greater than its predecessor had been. This autumn, all being well, he hoped to ship, to different centres of the world, animals aggregating in value over six thousand dollars. Already he had received orders amounting to as much.

He had, at first, been reluctant to send his wild friends to the cities, although he realized what few, not understanding the dangers and vicissitudes the wild things are subject to in their native haunts, realized, that they would be far better fed and cared for than if left to the mercy of the forest of deep snows, scant food, and crafty fur-takers. But within the protected zone of his Retreat, they seemed so happy and satisfied, he hated to send them away. This, however, he was forced to do for two reasons.

There was grave danger of the Preserve becoming overcrowded. After all, one thousand acres was not such an ample field for his wild friends, when measured against the millions of forest land which surrounded it. Every spring found numbers of young wild things, which too must have their running and feeding scope, and the caring for so

many, within a limited area, at last became a problem which had to be worked out. And this is one reason why numbers of his wild kindred were sent to new homes each autumn.

The other reason why Dorkin deemed it advisable to dispose of his animals was that the specimens brought splendid prices. Not that the money so acquired appealed to him selfishly; in fact, he never thought of money thus secured as a personal gain, and he would have scorned using it to further his personal interests. But his love of the wild things, whom he had so well learned to understand, and over whom he possessed such marvellous power, his sympathies for them, were so deep-rooted that he had gradually become possessed of a great and wonderful ambition. Some day, if things went well, he intended to extend his circle of protection, and form a vast Preserve, sufficiently large to allow all his wild friends to come into it, and live their lives, unmolested by him or any other man. He had already learned how such a tract of wild land was to be obtained from the Government, and he was laying by every dollar, earned by his labor of love, to this end.

The trappers, he knew, particularly the more lawless of them, — Abe Dalton and those of the lower swales, for instance, — would resent having a Preserve of such magnitude stretching through the trapping-land in which they operated. It might even be necessary to acquire certain of their fields,

government land all, and held by them now simply through squatters' rights. This gave Dorkin some feelings of uneasiness. He was nothing, if not square. He wished to deprive no man of what was justly or even unjustly his. But to the big Solitude, with her unfathomable mysteries, he owed his rebuilding. He would pay that debt — in part at least — by protecting her children, the wild things he loved.

But there had crept into the harmony of his world a strange disturbing note. Dorkin first felt its jar on that morning when he faced Timberley on the sunny sward of the upland. The petty persecutions of the lawless trappers, who questioned his right to steal the finest specimens of furred creatures from their wiles, had been nothing. They were impediments which he had to meet as best he could.

But with the coming of Timberley, came also something to cause the man who had fought back a great unrest. The memory of those dead, fruitless days had been brought back to him. And with the harmony of his world ajar, had been borne home to him the realization that the great Mother, who had nursed him back to strength and poise of mind, had also fostered in him the primitive instinct to destroy, blindly, that which menaced him and his.

He knew he would assuredly have killed that self-confessed despoiler of his early hopes and dreams, on that golden summer morning, had it not

been for the restoration of his shattered harmony through the wailing note of Willow Farney's violin. Perhaps, then, he really now belonged to the primitive. If he enjoyed the bounty of his Wild, had he then any right to violate her laws? And her great law was "Protect thyself." Timberley threatened his wondrous world; he had sensed, in the city man's coming, disaster to him and his. Yet he had spared him; more, he had saved him from the claws and fangs of Lulu, the lynx. Twice, perhaps, had he then interfered with the laws of his solitude. But he was glad he had stayed his destroying hand, even although a disturbing note had been left to spoil the harmony of the great song.

Dorkin was thinking it all over now, as he sat beside the sick fox, Spray-Coat. That the attempted destruction of this, the most valuable animal of his Preserve, was a premeditated act by his enemies, he did not for a moment doubt. How far they were inclined to carry their lawlessness, he could not guess. Of one thing he was more than ever certain, however. The band of disturbers had a new leader. Previously, the annoyance had been trivial enough, such as the tearing down of his "No Trespassing" notices, or the cutting of his enclosure fence. But now, they were trying to strike the very heart of his project. It looked as though they were bent on the destruction of him and his.

He knew he had little cause to fear their attempting to destroy other of his animals, because it was

from those animals they hoped ultimately to derive gain. Doubtless the poisoning of Spray-Coat had been deliberately planned to intimidate him, and convince him of the intentions of his enemies to carry out their threat of the demolishment of his Preserve.

Dorkin, stroking the long, grey mane of the old fox, now sufficiently recovered to lick his hand, felt more of pity than anger towards those men who wished him harm. They were, he reasoned, but the thoughtless tools of a crafty master mind. That mind, he felt sure, was Abe Dalton's. But beyond Dalton was another — and Dorkin was as sure he knew him.

Slowly he rose and looked about him. Into his strong face had crept the gravity of a set purpose. The eyes sweeping the woodland, taking on its cloak of early twilight, held a light hard as blue flint, and the muscles of his massive arms trembled like destroying agents held in leash.

Up from the eastward a black cloud was rolling. The trees, standing whisperless and dead, stirred to sigh of warning. Dorkin watched the onrushing storm-clouds for an instant, then, producing a whistle from his pocket, sent a shrill blast out on the stillness.

Almost immediately it was answered from different parts of the forest, and very soon LaPeer and Danny stood beside him. Dorkin looked from one to the other of his helpers, searchingly. He was

considering whether it was best to tell them what he had learned that afternoon.

"Danny," he asked, "has Willow returned with Spray-Coat's puppies?"

"Yes, Dorkin," the boy answered, "I was helpin' her put 'em away fer the night."

"Well, you'd better go and bring her into the house, laddy. The storm will be on us in another half-hour."

Obediently, the boy turned away. Dorkin waited until the trees hid him from sight; then he turned to LaPeer. "I was afraid to tell him what I'm going to tell you, Pete," he said. "There's no saying into what trouble his hot heart might lead him — and us. Look!"

From an inner pocket Dorkin produced a small leather card-case and laid it in the Frenchman's hand. "Open it, Pete."

LaPeer wonderingly obeyed. "Sacré!" he exclaimed. "Dere ees name in here — and it 's hees name, Timberley. Ze skunk!"

His hand shook, as he handed back the case. "You foun' dat? You pick it up, maybee —?"

"Yes, back where we found old Spray-Coat, Pete."

The Frenchman stood silent, his head bent in thought.

Dorkin reached forward and put a hand on his shoulder. "Pete," he said quietly, "I know I can count on you. You have learned to look upon these

wild things we are protecting as more than mere wild things. You don't intend to let them fall into the hands of those vandals, do you?"

LaPeer jerked his slender form erect and threw out his arms. "By de cross of Christ, no!" he cried. "I fight all de tam fer dem t'ing I love. Let dem feller come, an' I keel dem queek as I keel skulking weasel! Don't I know, me? Don't I fin' out all 'bout what de law allow us to do, to protect our own?"

"Yes, Pete. But let us be careful not to take life, save in self-defence," cautioned his master. "You told me that you knew five or six men, down in the valley, who might be trusted. Can you get them to come up here and help us stand guard over our Preserve, do you think?"

"Sure t'ing," nodded La Peer. "Already, I tak it on maself to fin' out if dey will come, Dorkin. To-night, now, will I go down dere and speak de word to dem men."

Dorkin pondered, his eyes on the darkening skies above the clearing. "After the storm has passed, if you like, Pete," he said.

He held out his hand, and with that spirit of kindredship, closer than brotherhood, the Frenchman gripped it. Something warm splashed down on Dorkin's wrist, and as he turned towards his cabin, there was that in his heart which drowned the bitter anger which had scorched it.

## CHAPTER XIX

THE night was late. Outside, the summer world of Shagland, drenched and refreshed by the downpour of rain, slept peacefully beneath the low-hanging stars. In his cabin, beside the heavy oaken table, Dorkin sat alone, his arms folded, his chin sunk on his breast. At his feet slept Larry, the setter, heavy muzzle between his paws, dreaming fitfully and waking suddenly at intervals to cast a questioning look at his master.

On a bearskin, in the corner of the room, lay the sick fox, curled up in a ball; and close beside her, in a wicker crate, five other smaller balls, which were her sleeping puppies.

Dorkin was suddenly called out of his reverie by a whine from the mother fox.

He sat up, yawning and stretching his cramped muscles.

"Well, Spray-Coat," he called, "are you pretty nearly all right again? What are you begging for? Is it your puppies?"

She sat up on her haunches and smiled a pleading and ingratiating smile, by opening her red mouth and protruding her red tongue. Her magnificent brush swept to and fro, coaxingly.

Dorkin gazed on her fondly. She was certainly

a beautiful thing, and quite as wise, he told himself, as she was beautiful.

"Spray-Coat," he adjured, "you must be a good fox. Lie down and go to sleep, and maybe you can have your puppies in the morning."

"But I want them now," said the bright eyes, gazing steadily into his.

He shook his head and, rising, crossed to the corner. Larry sat up and watched his master, ears lifted and head cocked sidewise.

Dorkin reached down and felt the tip of the slender muzzle which the mother fox raised to him. "No fever, Spray-Coat," he said, "not the tiniest little bit. But, you see, grand lady, you may still have some poison in your system, so we must keep little Silo and the others away from you till morning, at least."

"Tell you what we'll do, though," he offered, as the old fox gave a pitiful whine: "we'll fix it so that you can reach your head in that cage and nose the sleepy little beggars, if you want to. See here!"

With his knife he cut a hole through the wickerwork of the crate, sufficiently large for Spray-Coat to insert her head.

"Now, then, go wake 'em up," he laughed.

She needed no second bidding. A moment later and she was in the crate up to her shoulders, nosing tenderly each of those grey balls and licking each yawning little face raised whimperingly to hers.

"Larry," Dorkin addressed the dog, who had

drawn close to watch proceedings with alert interest, "there, you see about twenty-five thousand dollars' worth of silver-greys, as estimated by the world of money-grabbers. And, Larry, boy," he said softly, "there you see about as many million dollars' worth of love, known only in this, your world and mine. Is n't it grand, purp, is n't it?"

He caught the shaggy setter, as he leaped to leave a damp caress on his master's face, and shook him roughly to and fro. "You're a wonderful chap, Larry," he cried, giving the dog a resounding slap, "and you belong to a wonderful family. We'll all stand together, won't we, boy? And if we fall, we'll fall together, eh?"

The setter whined, and curled up at Dorkin's feet, once more, as he resumed his seat by the table.

Somewhere, in the silent cabin, a clock chimed the hour of two, and still Dorkin sat, with folded arms, thinking. Then voices sounded outside, and Larry, with a low growl, sprang erect.

A moment later Pete LaPeer entered the room. Behind him trailed half a dozen lean-faced, steady-eyed men of the forest.

Dorkin stood up and shook each of them by the hand, calling them all by their first names, and drawing from each a flashing smile, as he made them welcome.

From a big cupboard he brought a platter of cold meat and crackers and cheese, and placed it on the table. Pete went to the kitchen, and brewed a big

pot of tea, the kind all genuine woodsmen love. This, with white, flaky biscuits, such as only Pete's good wife knew how to bake, along with wonderful confections brought up from the city, certainly looked inviting to the men, some of whom had had considerable of a tramp and paddle to get there.

"We wait on one anudder," Pete explained to Dorkin, as they all seated themselves, and fell to. "Dat is bes' plan, eh? We all come in togedder."

"Fine," Dorkin commended, and, looking gratefully from one to the other of the men who had so willingly responded to his call, "I want to say, right here, that it was white of you chaps. I won't forget it."

They shook their heads and murmured that what they had done — was nothing. That was like them. Dorkin knew that not one of them had come in hopes of pecuniary gain. To a man, they had come out of regard for him, and his; and the conviction brought a lump to his throat.

"Boys," he said, after the meal was over, and pipes were alight, "I guess you know why Pete went after you, to-night. I'm not going to mince matters any by saying you're not running into danger by coming here to help us guard our Preserve. There *is* danger; danger of being shot by those who wish to wreck this place, danger of incurring the enmity of the raiders by standing shoulder to shoulder with us. Now, then, boys, if that was n't clear to you before, it is now, and if

any of you want to withdraw, you can do so, and still be my friend."

He paused, waiting for some one to speak.

Some one did. A grizzled-haired trapper, smoking a corn-cob pipe, cleared his throat deliberately, spat in the empty fireplace, and growled: "Oh, hell, Dorkin, don't spoil our good time by sendin' any of us back. We're jest naturally achin' fer a chance at Dalton an' his crew, eh, boys?"

"That's what!" and, "You've said it, Sol!" from the others.

"Thanks, men," said Dorkin quietly.

He walked over to the corner where the trappers had stacked their rifles, and surveyed the miscellaneous array of guns. All were woefully antique, with the exception of the one owned by the man, Sol, and it was not by any means modern, being but a single-shot, breech-loading rifle, of small calibre.

Dorkin knew that every man among them was watching him, knew how much each of those loyal bushmen loved his rifle, guessed what sacrifices he had made to secure it, and knew of the hope in each heart that some day he might own a repeating rifle, like LaPeer's.

So it was with a smile on his face and a gladness in his heart that he turned from his inspection, and crossed the room to what looked like a bookcase built into the wall.

"Boys," he addressed his volunteers, his hand on

the knob of the door, "when a man has found something valuable, it's natural for him to want to keep it, is n't it? I found these hardwoods, you might say, and I found the wild things who make their homes in it. I love it and them. I don't want to lose either."

"You won't," they assured him.

"Well, I don't intend to," he resumed. "But, boys, I've found something else that I value, something else I want to keep by me, too, if I can, and that's the loyalty of six good men."

He waited a little, and then continued: —

"I would like you men to come up and make your homes here on the Preserve, if you will, you and your families. We'll build each of you a fine cabin and see that you want for nothing. I might as well tell you now," he said, to the look of wonder in their eyes, "that I am acquiring another considerable tract of forest from the Government, and will require the help of six or more men. Pete and I have about all we can do now."

Again he paused to mark the result of his words; then he said gently: "All your lives you men have hunted and trapped the wild things, in order that you might live. I can pay you all five times more money than you are now making, if you are willing to come and be one with us, and help those wild things to live. No!" he cried, holding up his hand as they were about to joyfully agree. "Think it over, and let me know later. We've got something

else to consider now, and we've got to get into action right away."

He threw open the door of the case, and beckoned the men forward. "Behold your new artillery," he smiled. "A new rifle to each man who has proved his loyal friendship to me this night."

He laughed, boyishly, as they crowded about the beautiful repeaters, with expressions of wonder and delight. Well he knew how each man of them had craved for such a gun, and in the purchase of these for them, he had derived a great deal of happiness. He had intended making the gifts at Christmas, but it looked as though it were the better plan to let his woods-friends have them now. The raiders would, undoubtedly, have modern firearms.

One after another, Dorkin passed the rifles out to hands that shook in their eagerness to caress them. Pete had struggled in with a big wooden box of cartridges. Dorkin pried the box open and distributed the smaller cases to the trappers.

The simple woodsmen were wild in their glee at possessing each a new, modern rifle. They wrung Dorkin's hand until it ached, and he laughingly begged them to desist. They swore they would stand by him through anything, and scorned the idea of him paying them for helping him in his extended Preserve.

"Jest let us come an' work with an' fer you, an' all we ask is our livin'," they told him.

It was almost morning before Dorkin at last got his friends to lie down to sleep in the big inner room, the floor of which was spread with thick skins. And when, finally, they did lie down, each man fell asleep cuddling the rifle of which he had often dreamed, but never thought to possess.

Dorkin did not seek his own bed. His mind was strangely awake and active. The fatigue he had felt during the earlier part of the night had passed. He cleared the table of its dishes and broken victuals, and sat down to wait for dawn.

Over in the corner Spray-Coat had curled herself up to sleep, her slender muzzle touching the big wicker crate which held her puppies. The setter, too, was stretched out on a rug, paws crossed, heavy head resting on them, dreaming of dappled coveys on some shady upland.

Dorkin got up and passed across to the open door. Beneath the paling stars the forest swept, a sable blue, which melted with dense shadows beyond. It was the darkness which precedes the dawn, the hour in which the Great Silence holds in its grip the world of the solitudes.

Suddenly from out of the shadows, as Dorkin watched, a human form detached itself, and moved swiftly towards him.

"Is that you, Dorkin?" came Danny Farney's voice, in a whisper.

"Yes, Danny; is anything the matter?" Dorkin queried anxiously.

"Gawd! yes," panted the lad. "Kin any one hear us, Dorkin?"

"No, we're alone. Come inside, Danny."

He placed his arm about the boy's shoulders and drew him into the cabin. "Why, you are all wet and torn — and your face is cut!" he exclaimed. "Where have you been? And what is wrong? Tell me quickly."

He pushed the boy into a chair and sat down opposite. "I've been doin' a little scoutin'," Danny explained, "and I'm nigh dead-beat, I am."

Dorkin got up and produced a small flask from the cupboard. "Here," he said, pouring a generous portion of the liquor into a glass, "drink that. It's brandy, and you need it."

Danny quaffed the burning draught without a tremor, and, slowly, a little color came into his drawn face.

"Dorkin," he said, leaning forward so that his voice might carry no farther than his listener's ears, "*Dalton's gang is goin' ter raid this Preserve, to-morrow night.*"

Dorkin gripped his arm. "How do you know that, Danny?" he asked in strained tones.

"I've been lyin' outside half-breed Darbo's cabin all night, listenin' to their plans," the boy answered. "Darbo ain't thar, but they meet at his place jest the same."

"And you heard them plan to come here to-morrow night?"

"Yes, it's to be late, nigh mornin' likely. There'll be ten of 'em, all told. I heered 'em arrange everythin', but I could n't see any of 'em. I was hidin' close up in the rear of the cabin, an' they had cotton tacked 'cross the winder."

Dorkin frowned and paced to and fro across the room. "And you could n't say, positively, who any of them were?" he asked.

"Wall, I recognized Abe Dalton's voice," answered the boy. "And I know Gregg was thar, too, 'cause I heered him tellin' the others 'bout gettin' a flesh wound from Willer's rifle, the night him an' some one else was snoopin' 'round on this Preserve. He said you'd pay fer that, to-morrow night, Dorkin. So you watch out."

"I'll watch out, Danny. Did you happen to overhear anything as to what their object in coming here was? Is it the animals they want, or me?"

"It's both," said the boy. "They figure on gettin' hold of your animals, in the enclosure here, an' in wreckin' the whole place. It seems that Dalton is n't the real leader in this thing, although he's mighty pleased to take a hand. The prime mover in it is a stranger ter me; leastwise, I never heered his voice before, as I kin remember. Seems like he's the one who's ter get the animals, 'cause I heered him say he had a place all ready fer 'em."

"And their plan, Danny?"

"Why, they figger on comin' up by way of Poplar Cove, in canoes, an' enterin' Duck Lake. They'll

cross an' come up the path ter the grove. They look fer us to be asleep an' unsuspectin'. They aim ter set fire to your cabins, an' give us all the hell they've got ter give."

Dorkin paused in his pacing to smile commendingly down at the boy. "Danny," he said, "you're a brick! You're a wonder, Danny!"

"Oh, hell!" Danny's face grew red and he squirmed uneasily.

"Just one more question, Danny. Have you any idea who this man, this leader, who is to get the animals — maybe — is?"

The boy glanced up slowly, searching Dorkin's face with keen eyes. "Yes, I have," he said. "It's Timberley."

"I thought so." Dorkin's jaw set, and his brows came together. He stood looking down at the boy, considering.

"Danny," he said at length, "I knew they intended coming some time to-morrow night. There is some person who is onto their plans, who is a friend of mine. I don't know who it is. See, this is what I found tacked to a tree this afternoon."

From his pocket he drew a slip of paper, and handed it to the boy. On it was printed: —

"*Enemies will try to destroy your Retreat to-morrow night. Be warned.* *A Well-Wisher.*"

Danny spelled out the words, nodded comprehendingly, and handed the paper back to Dorkin.

"Then that's why you sent Pete down fer the trappers, across the divide?" he asked.

"Yes, but Pete does n't know I found this warning, Danny."

The boy sat huddled up in his chair, his nervous fingers caressing the lock of the rifle he still held on his knees.

"I wisht t' Gawd Sagawa was back," he burst out, at length. "He's gone out arter the man he thinks murdered Dad, an' I ain't carin' ter shoot the man *I* think killed him, till Sagawa says I kin. What a chanst I'd have to-morrow night, Dorkin," he said wistfully, "an' I'm goin' ter miss it. 'Course," he added, "I kin shoot Dalton, but I can't jest tell him it's on account of his murderin' Dad, not unless I know fer sure. Yep, I sure do wish Sagawa was back."

Dorkin patted the boy's shoulder. "Something tells me he will be back," he comforted, "and, Danny, I do believe he alone knows who it was killed your daddy. Something tells me he'll come, boy, because he once said that when I needed him, he would be here. And I need him now, Heaven knows."

The boy's head was sagging through sheer weariness. Dorkin bent and took the rifle from his hands. "Come on to my room and lie down, Danny," he suggested.

"No," said Danny, "I gotter slip across to La-Peer's cabin. Willer, she's liable ter be lookin' fer me, an' if she finds me gone, she'll be worried."

Dorkin smiled at the boy's thoughtfulness. "I'll see Willow and explain things," he promised.

"All right, much obliged," yawned Danny, "an', Dorkin, ye won't jest mention anythin' 'bout my bein' down among them wolves, not ter her, will ye?"

"No, Danny."

Dorkin led him to a roomy bedroom and pointed to a big, comfortable-looking bed. "Now you sprawl on that, and sleep as long as you want to," he said.

"Dorkin," frowned the boy, as he unlaced his moccasins, "d' ye s'pose you could get hold of Willer's rifle, an' hide it up?"

"Why?"

"Wall, it's like this. I'm willin' ter do all the killin' that's necessary fer the Farney fambly. Willer, she jest naturally hates anythin' or any one that threatens you, Dorkin — an' she kin shoot like hell. You tell me you'll hide her rifle, an' I'll sleep happy."

"I'll do my best, Danny," Dorkin assured him, and passed out, drawing the skin curtain across the door behind him.

## CHAPTER XX

At the first streak of dawn the trappers in the big room were astir, and an hour later they had breakfasted and were ready to take their orders from Dorkin, when he came in, fresh and wide-awake, after his morning dip in the lake.

"Boys," he greeted them, "you have n't had much chance to sleep, but you 'll have a good opportunity to rest up to-day. I 'd like you, one and all, to go along with Pete, who will place you at different points in the outer Preserve. Please remember, though, that you are not to fire on any person you may see sneaking through the woods. Keep well under cover, keep a good lookout, and if you see anything worth-while, you can report this evening to me. Pete's wife is preparing a lunch for each of you and for certain reasons, which I 'll explain later, I desire that you do not come in until darkness has fallen."

He smiled, as he noticed with what pride each of the trappers held his new rifle, and raised a finger in warning. "Remember, now," he cautioned, "no shooting, unless I pass the word. To-morrow, if you like, we 'll have a regular old-fashioned shooting-match down along the lake."

The men flashed him a look of gratitude, as they

passed silently out after LaPeer, and Dorkin, with a grave face, turned to his own breakfast.

He resented, with all his nature, the part he was being forced to play; resented having to put himself on the defensive against those lawless trappers of the valley, in order to protect what was his. God alone knew what would happen when they came stealing up, under cover of darkness, intent upon destroying all that which he had taken such pride in achieving. One thing he must do, though: he must prevent the sacrilege at all costs. In doing this, he was not fighting for himself, but for that sweet and wonderful Something which had given him back his strength, his manhood, and his self-respect.

He rose, at length, having scarcely touched his food, and sought the scented out-of-doors. As he passed slowly up the path, Willow came from LaPeer's cabin, and stood waiting for him. The morning sunlight bathed her brown, waving hair, and glorified her sweet face. She smiled him a quick "Good-morning," and laid her brown hand on his arm, in the old-time caress.

He had missed the touch of her fingers on his arm, missed many of those old, familiar intimacies which lay back of the valley, on the other side of the brook dividing girlhood and womanhood. Now, her touch brought home to him a realization of what he had lost, and what he would know again only at rare intervals, as now.

"Willow, the Wisp," he half whispered, his heart surging to a note that thrilled above all others of his world; then he checked himself and fought back to the present order of things.

"Willow, the Wisp," he repeated, "you are growing away from me. The girl who used to scold me, and caution me, and romp with me, is gone. I miss my little pal, and I long for the fairyland into which she used to waft me with her violin."

"Then *she* has n't made you quite forget — all that, Dorkin?" she asked eagerly.

"She?"

"The girl with hair as yellow as adder-tongues an' eyes as blue as swamp-linnet's eggs — the beautiful girl who has been with you so much lately, Dorkin?"

He placed his hands on her shoulders, and smiled down into her upturned face.

"You know she has not," he answered. "Why should you ask that, Willow, the Wisp?"

She shivered and drew away from him. She stood straight before him, hands clenched, grey eyes searching his own.

"Before she came," she said wistfully, "I thought we were mates, you an' me. Then, when I saw you an' her together, I knowed I was wrong. So, you see, Dorkin . . . I've been keepin' away from you. I've jest got to get used to goin' alone."

She turned away down the path. He let her go, his eyes following the slender figure until it dis-

appeared in the forest. Then, with a sigh, he sought a path leading in an opposite direction.

He paused before the cage of the big lynx, and threw down the bars. Lulu lifted her head, yawning lazily and stretching; then she bounded lightly out, and rolled over and over on the sward, at his feet.

"This is the last day for you with your family, Lulu," he informed her, as he put up the bars. "We wean your kittens to-morrow."

The big cat bounded forward and leaped to the low-hanging branch of a tree, where she lay, flattened out, round head between heavy paws, greenish-amber eyes fastened on his face, short tail lashing in mock fury.

It was an old game which they had played together from the time she was a kitten. He was supposed to be the unsuspecting quarry of that terrible thing which was ready to pounce and kill.

So he came on, all unsuspicious, and as he passed beneath the branch upon which Lulu lay, she dropped upon his shoulders with a spitting snarl, which immediately turned into a hoarse purr, as his big hands gripped her by the neck and shook her from side to side.

"You old impostor!" he cried. "I swear, I can't play this game with you, without a shudder, but somehow, I always humor you in it."

He put her on the ground and continued along up the trail, busy again with problems which perplexed and distressed him.

It was noon when he returned to the Retreat, to find Pa Washburn, Mr. Dayton, and Edna Marsh seated in the grove in front of the cabins.

He shook hands cordially, all around, admired the beautiful little fawn which Edna held on her lap, and after chatting for a time on general topics, excused himself while he cleaned up for dinner.

Washburn followed him into the cabin.

"Dorkin," said the settler, when they were alone, "they be goin' back to the city to-morrow. They came over to say good-bye."

"Going back to-morrow!" answered Dorkin in surprise. "And why have they made up their minds to do that, so suddenly?"

"That's what Ma an' me 'ud like ter know, Dorkin, but they don't say nothin', 'cept they feel they orter get back. Maybe ye noticed how nervous that Mr. Dayton is gettin' ter be?" he asked. "An' the gal, why, see here, Dorkin, she's fallin' away ter a shadder. It sure worries me an' Ma a lot, 'cause she is suttinly a splendid gal."

Dorkin filled a basin with cold water and reached for a cake of soap.

Washburn's blue eyes watched him pleadingly.

"Dorkin," he said, awkwardly, when at last the young man was through with his splashing, "I reckon that leetle gal is in love with some no-count chap, who has n't got sense enough to see it. I'll bet a raisin cookie I 'm right!"

Dorkin laughed; then as suddenly his face grew serious. "Perhaps you *are* right, Pop," he said.

Washburn nodded and combed his goatee, excitedly. "By the flat-tailed beaver!" he exploded, "if you let that leetle gal go away with an ache in her heart, Dorkin, you ain't nigh big enough ter be one of Gawd's lieutenants up here in His woods."

Dorkin turned slowly, a frown on his face. "What the deuce are you driving at, Pop?" he exclaimed. "She don't love *me*, if that's what you mean."

"How d' ye know?" came back the old man. "Have you ever ast her?"

"No, it is n't necessary. Listen, Pop." Dorkin put his arm about his old friend's shoulders. "It's another man," he said gently, "and I know who." He paused watching the working face of the man who had been more than a father to him. "Pop," he said softly, "Edna Marsh brought a heartache up here with her. It does n't just seem like this world of ours to let her take it back with her, does it? But, Pop, I'm afraid she'll have to do it."

"Oh, hell an' peat-fire!" sighed Washburn hopelessly. "It don't seem as we could do anythin'. An' I was plum sure an' sartin it was you. Oh, by cripes! it's too bad."

Throughout the summer afternoon Dorkin and Edna strolled along the scented trails, and chatted as they rested on the mossy banks of the swift streams. If she noticed a new gravity in his face, or if, at times, he grew somewhat preoccupied, she

gave no sign. She was thinking of how soon she was to leave this world which she had learned to love, and wondering if he, with his keen perception, had guessed anything of the struggle she was passing through. If so, he was kind, for by neither look nor word had he shown her that he knew she was suffering.

"Uncle is failing," she informed him in answer to his expression of regret at her sudden resolve to go back to the city. "At first, he seemed so much better, too. And they have been so good and kind to us, those dear people of Lookup," she said gratefully. "Whatever will they think of us, packing up and running away, so suddenly?"

"They will miss you, I am sure," he answered. "Of course," he added hopefully, "you will come back before the summer is ended. You must come back, you know, to see that your pet fawn is being given the care we have promised to give her."

"Oh, the sweet little thing," cried the girl. "Do you know, she follows me everywhere! I know she will cry for me, I just know it!"

The tears sprang to her own eyes, as she spoke, and Dorkin looked quickly away.

"I shall tell her that you are coming back soon," he said, "and feed her sugar and give her all the little attentions necessary to spoil her, and make her a wilful little deer."

She flashed him a grateful smile through her tears.

"I am so glad, so very glad that I came and found you as you are," she said, as they arose to seek the cabin. "I could say it differently," she smiled, "but you will understand."

"I understand," he told her. He knew she was suffering; he wanted to tell her that he knew, and that she was not to give up hope. But what could he say?

For one thing, he was thankful. She need never know the crowning climax of the perfidy of the man she loved. What was to happen, to-night, could, at least, be kept from her knowledge.

As they came into the clearing, they met Washburn hurrying towards them.

"Mr. Dayton has had a faintin' spell," he informed them. "Not much, Miss," as he noted the girl's paling cheek. "Jest a leetle weakness, I guess. We put him to bed, and he'll be all right soon, I'm sure."

They hurried up the path and entered the cabin. Mr. Dayton lay across the bed, his face bloodless, eyes hollow, and fingers nervously twitching.

Dorkin bent above him. "What is it, Mr. Dayton?" he asked gently. "Are you suffering?"

The banker struggled to rise and fell back again, with a little gasp. "Just weakness, Mr. Dorkin," he panted. "I am very sorry to be a nuisance — very —"

"You must n't say that," Dorkin returned kindly, as he took the brandy and water which Mrs. La-

Peer had brought in, and let a few drops trickle between the blue lips.

"Uncle, dear," cried Edna, sinking beside him.

He reached out a thin, trembling hand, and stroked the golden head. Tears started from the closed eyes and rolled down the sunken cheeks. "There, there, girlie," he whispered, "I'll be all right, soon."

Dorkin drew the others outside, leaving the sick man alone with his niece. His face looked troubled. Pa Washburn, noting it, followed him, as he walked slowly down the path to the lake.

"Hold on, Big Boy," he called. "Now, then," as Dorkin wheeled about, with a frown, "tell the old man jest what's the matter. You've been playin' hide-an'-seek among the clouds all day. Now jest up an' let's have what's on yer mind, Dorkin."

Dorkin stood considering. Then, as though he had reached a decision, he spoke quickly: "Dalton and his gang intend raiding this place to-night, Pop. I am ready to give them a warm reception, but — I wish, *they* had n't come over to-day. I wish Mr. Dayton had n't been taken ill. It's going to make things bad, don't you see? There's no telling just what might happen."

Washburn's blue eyes had opened, wide, at the intelligence imparted by the worried keeper.

"And, by cripes! you was n't goin' ter tell the old man a thing 'bout this comin' fight, eh? Well, by cripes!"

"But you see, Pop," Dorkin explained, "I knew that if I told you, you'd want to stay and see it through, and what I aimed at doing was to have you and your visitors take Willow home with you, to-night. Mrs. LaPeer is going down to the Settlement, too. She has a sister there. You see," he frowned, "this thing is very liable to be —"

"It's liable to be some messy, I know," nodded Washburn, "but I, fer one, am glad things happened as they did, this arternoon. If they had n't happened so, how would I ever got a chance to help argue this question with them outlaws? You'll have to lend me a rifle, Dorkin," he finished, with a smack of satisfaction.

To Dorkin that fateful night was long in coming. At last as day faded and the long shadows of twilight crept across forests and hill, and the whip-poor-will called through the scented dusk, night fell, a soft cowl of blackness upon the wooded world.

With night came the silent, alert watchers of the trails — slipping from the big outer Preserve, under cover of darkness, and seating themselves silently down to the supper prepared for them on the big table in the cabin.

Not a man among them but knew that this might be the last meal for him; but realized that Dalton and his followers would fight, and, if necessary, kill, to effect their desired purpose. But they did not fear. They were prepared to fight fire with fire.

An hour later they arose and passed outside again. Dorkin was waiting for them and led them down the path towards the lake. No word was spoken until the forest bordering it was reached, then Dorkin gave them their orders.

"We will wait for them here," he said. "When they land, each of you will remain in the position in which he has been placed. I will demand that they throw down their arms and surrender. If they refuse, and fire, we will return their fire. But, boys," he adjured, "they must n't get past us."

"They'll not!" came in a growl as from one man.

"And remember, let them fire first."

He glanced about him, and motioned Danny Farney a little apart from the others.

"Danny," he said, — and there was a note in his voice that the boy had never heard before, — "to-night I want you to bury all personal enmity against Dalton, and fight toe to toe with me and the others, for our World. Don't shoot, unless you have to. God knows, this thing is terrible enough to have to do, without letting passion and blood-lust master us."

"Jest as you say, Dorkin," Danny replied. "I was n't aimin' ter take any chance till Sagawa comes back, anyway."

"That's right, Danny. Now you keep this position, and I'll place the others. Then I'm going up to the cabins for a moment or so." He reached for the lad's hand and gripped it in his.

Fifteen minutes later, having stationed his men, Dorkin went up to the cabin. He found the patient much improved, Edna sitting beside him. Mrs. LaPeer had given over going to the Settlement. She had not wanted to go, in the first place, and welcomed the excuse of having visitors to keep her at home.

Dorkin remained a short time talking to his guests. "By the way," he remarked, as he turned to go, "if you happen to hear shooting, during the night, do not be concerned. Word has reached us that a wolf-pack is in the region of the Preserve, and to-night we are going to stay awake on the chance of a shot." And bidding them a good-night and pleasant dreams, he passed out.

As he stepped from the cabin, Willow came from the shadows and confronted him.

"Dorkin," she said, "is Dalton an' his men comin' to-night?"

"Who told you they were, Willow?" he asked in surprise.

"Nobody told me. I know, that's all. What did you do with my rifle?" she demanded.

"I put it away, Willow."

"Why?"

"Because I was afraid you might hurt somebody."

She threw back her head, and laughed the old, defiant laugh he used to hear.

"Well, why should n't I hurt somebody?" she

asked. "That's what the rest of you intend doin', if you have to, ain't it?"

Dorkin shook his head. "But you must n't run into danger, Willow, the Wisp," he admonished. "I want you to promise me that you will go into the cabin, and stay there till morning."

"*Well, I shan't do it!*"

She stamped her foot on the sward and tossed her head angrily.

He turned away. "All right, Willow," he said. "Of course, I can't make you. But I would feel so much better if I knew you were safe, inside. That's all."

She caught his arm as he turned to go.

"I'm right sorry, Dorkin," she choked. "I'll go in. I'll do whatever you say."

"Thanks, Willow, the Wisp."

"Then, good-bye, and God keep you safe."

She reached up and drew his face down against her own wet cheek.

"It's your leetle pal speakin', Dorkin," she whispered, and kissed him.

## CHAPTER XXI

To the watchers in the forest the night passed slowly. Midnight came, but no sign of the raiders. The hours dragged by, and still no dip of paddle came to listening ears, to vigilant eyes, no shadowy shapes of canoes stealing across the lake.

Then, just as darkness was giving place to dawn, they came. Dorkin, standing in a thicket of birch, close beside the trail, glimpsed them first, and gave the sharp cluck of a partridge, the signal agreed upon to let the others know. But there was no other sound except the faint click of rifle-hammers being drawn back, and the low hoot of a horned owl, oblivious to their presence.

The canoes came on, abreast, five of them, with two men to a canoe. They beached simultaneously, and the paddlers leaped noiselessly out, and grouped upon the shore.

Once more there sounded the cluck of the disturbed partridge. The little owl gave a startled hoot, and sailed off on soft, silent wings.

The raiders, grouped closely together, were, apparently, receiving their final instructions from the leader.

"You, Bill, Jake, and Ben," Dalton was saying,

in guarded tones, "look after firing the cabins when we have drawn Dorkin, and whoever else he has with him, away. You, Speers and Hanley, take this sack and get that old silver grey and her puppies. You other boys know what animals you're to get hold of."

Fifteen yards away Dorkin's voice rang out. "Up with your hands! We have ten rifles trained on you and we'll shoot if you move."

A sound, something like a gasp, came from the surprised raiders.

Then Dalton's voice shouted, "It's a bluff, men!"

But all, with the exception of himself and one other, had obeyed that crisp command.

"Bluff, hell!" growled one, his hands high in the air. "That feller never bluffs."

Dorkin stepped from the thicket, with presented rifle. "Dalton," he said quietly, "it's no use, I've got you and your band dead to rights. Throw down that gun."

In answer Dalton pitched his rifle forward, firing from the hip. The bullet grazed Dorkin's cheek.

Then, cutting the lifting shadows of the lake, there came a streak of flame, and from a canoe, in which sat two men, a small-calibre rifle barked.

Dalton sank slowly down on the rocks, and lay still. The trappers had stepped out from the woods and ranged themselves up alongside of Dorkin.

A voice among Dalton's men cried, "Every-

body run for it!" But before they could act on the suggestion, Dorkin's men closed in on them.

One of them, however, a big man, dressed in grey tweeds and wearing a felt hat, broke through the guard and leaped for the forest, turning at its edge to fire at the men who pursued him. They returned his fire just as he entered the protecting timber.

As the pursuers turned to rejoin their comrades, a form reeled back from the trees and sprawled on the open.

"Wall, we got him, arter all!" cried Pa Washburn. "Dorkin," he called, "when ye get them yeller-backs tied up secure, would ye mind comin' over here an' see if you know who this feller is, as we've plunked!"

The prisoners were being securely bound, hand and foot.

"I'll make up my mind later just what I'll do with you," Dorkin informed them as he turned away towards Washburn.

"Man down, you say, Pop?" he asked as he came up. "Too bad, but not near as bad as I feared it might be. Where is he?"

"He's layin' up thar, jest outside the woods, Dorkin. Come along an' I'll show you."

The faint flush of dawn was spreading in the eastern sky and the shadows were lifting from lake and forest, as Dorkin bent over the still form on the ground, and turned it over so that he could see the face.

"Timberley!" he gasped. "Good God!"

"Timberley!" echoed the settler. "By cripes! but it's a sudden end to a chap that's gone wrong."

"Pop," spoke Dorkin quickly, "take his feet and help me carry him up to my cabin. No, not in that direction, we'll go up through the woods. I have a reason for not wanting our boys to know about this."

"All right, Dorkin; I've got my half secure, you jest lead the way. Did ye say he was gone?" asked the settler anxiously.

"No, he is n't dead — not yet. Can you stand a little faster pace, Pop?"

"Me? I can go as fast as you like. Speed up."

In a short time they reached the cabin. They found Mr. Dayton up and dressed, though pale and shaky. LaPeer's wife was trying her best to quiet his agitation. Edna, she informed Dorkin, in answer to his quick question, was in her room, and Willow had gone out, she did n't know where.

Dorkin had taken the precaution to cover Timberley's face with his handkerchief. Beyond giving the wounded man a startled look, the banker paid no attention. He seemed to be in a dazed condition.

"Straight on to my room, Pop," whispered Dorkin. "Now," he said, after Timberley had been placed on the bed, "you go on back to the lake, Pop, and help the boys bring in the prisoners. I've got to do what I can for this wounded man."

"Humph!" snorted the settler, and strode from the room.

Dorkin bent above the unconscious Timberley and sought for his hurt. He found that the bullet had grazed the skull, inflicting a nasty scalp-wound. It relieved him to find it no worse. He washed and bandaged the wound, then he poured a teaspoonful of brandy down the man's throat.

Slowly, Timberley came back to consciousness and opened his eyes. They fell wonderingly on Dorkin, and a smile crossed his white lips.

"Everything pays, sometime," he whispered, and closed his eyes again.

From the window Dorkin saw his men returning with the prisoners. Glancing down to see that the wounded man was comfortable, he went out to meet them.

Timberley lay very still, so still, that the white-faced girl, who crept silently into the room, thought him dead, and fell on her knees beside him, with a low cry.

He turned his head slowly, and his eyes opened wide with wonder. "Edna," he whispered.

"Oh, Tom, Tom, my beloved," she sobbed. "You're not dead? Oh, thank God!"

She lifted his nerveless hand and crushed it to her lips. "Tom," she cried, "I love you in spite of all your wickedness, and I can't live without you."

"That's good news, Edna," he sighed, — "won-

derful news, — perhaps I have died or am dreaming — Edna," he whispered, "if you are really there, put your face down close against mine — Ah, God, then you are real, — real, and I am not dreaming. And — and you *do* love me?"

He was holding her head between his shaking hands, following that long kiss, and feasting his eyes on her glad face and golden hair.

"In spite of everything, I love you, Tom," she told him joyfully. She bent lower and kissed him again, then drew up as a step sounded outside the door.

Dorkin came hastily in, hesitating, with a word of apology, as he found Edna there.

There was a world of pity in his eyes, turned upon her, and not the slightest note of anger or resentment in his tones as he bent above the wounded man, and asked, "Better, Timberley?"

"Thanks, yes, I — I can't begin to tell you how much better," answered Timberley, his eyes glowing up at the radiant face of the girl.

Dorkin turned abruptly away. "You must look upon this place as your own until you are all right again," he told him. "I'm glad," he added, hesitatingly, as he turned to leave, "it was not serious."

Just outside the cabin he met Danny Farney. The boy's face was drawn and troubled. "Dorkin," he cried, "I've just found a wounded man in the woods. It's Timberley."

Dorkin grasped him by the wrist. "Timberley

is in there, Danny," he explained, motioning towards the cabin.

Danny gazed, spell-bound. "He is?" he gasped. "Well, who, then, is the other man, Dorkin?"

"One of Dalton's trappers, no doubt," answered Dorkin. "How was he dressed, Danny?"

"That's the funny part of it," frowned the lad. "He was dressed like Timberley allers dressed. Tweed clothes an' wide felt hat. Maybe you best come down thar an' see him fer yourself. He's jest 'bout gone."

Dorkin nodded and followed Danny down the trail. In the open glade of the forest, they came to the wounded man. Dorkin stepped forward and glanced down at the greying face.

"Savage!" he muttered. Then, turning to the boy, he said, "Please leave me alone with him, Danny." The lad, glad to get away, plunged back to the trail.

The dying man opened his eyes.

"Savage," said Dorkin sternly, "what's the meaning of this? Why are you dressed in those clothes? Whom are you impersonating?"

The wounded man smiled. "Timberley," he answered faintly.

"And why in the name of God?" Dorkin cried.

"Ask *him*."

Dorkin turned. Behind him stood Mr. Dayton. He was shaking like a leaf. His eyes were dull and staring.

"That man knows," gasped Savage. "He paid me to do it."

Dorkin twisted about on Dayton. "You hear what he said?" he cried in amazement. "Now, what have you to say?"

The old man trembled and tried to speak. At last he managed to articulate, "Yes, he speaks the truth. I paid him to do it."

"Why?"

"Because I was afraid of Timberley," shuddered the miserable banker. "He was a lawyer, and clever. My niece loved him. I had speculated with her money. I was afraid, if he married her, he would learn this, and that she would despise and hate me. By lies, I induced her to break her engagement with him. He followed us up here. I knew she still believed in him — I saw a chance to make him appear a villain in her eyes. Oh, God!" he wailed. "Why, why did I do it?"

In spite of the wrong he had done, Dorkin felt sorry for the poor, miserable wretch, grovelling before him.

Savage spoke. "Oh, he'll pay. He's payin' now. Everythin' pays sometime er other. I'm payin'. This is n't the first crooked deal I've helped him out in," he panted. "Ask him about a minin' deal I did his dirty work on, a pulpwood deal, we'd planned to work together. You see" — he explained, — "it was a temptation fer him. I was right here an' so was — Timberley. A good sport,

Timberley, big an' clean — he was your friend, too, an' had come to try an' warn you, this mornin' — we learned that from his Injun guide, Musko, but we knowed we could beat him here — an' did. I could have shot him, as I was gettin' away, but — why should I? — He was just comin' out of the woods when your men fired, an' he got the bullet intended for me — Well, I hope he has n't had to pay —"

"No," said Dorkin, almost tenderly, "he is about to be paid, in full, for the part he has played, Savage."

The dying man sighed. "Old Abe Dalton got his," he chuckled; "I saw that. Darbo, the half-breed, got him. I saw Dalton whip Darbo one night, when I was playin' the part of Timberley, for the first time. Darbo said he'd do it. Dalton was bad medicine — tried to double-cross me, he did — poisoned your silver grey fox, just because he thought I was after her, — oh, well, — I wonder who it was got me?"

Dorkin knelt beside the dying man and asked, "Anything I can do, Savage?"

The filming eyes opened, and a faint smile came to the ashen lips.

"Yes," he said, with a supreme effort, "you can tell Timberley I'm sorry. I sure did put him in bad with you — an' the gal who loved him. I'm just his size an' build, an' I got hold of clothes like his — I advertised him all through your Preserve —

stole his card-case when he was bathin' — dropped card an' case where you could find 'em — Well, you can do that, you can just tell him I'm sorry. That's one thing — Other is, you can take my hand an' hold it fer a minute. You're big, an' square — an' human. Wished to Gawd — I had known it — sooner. That's all."

A quiver ran through the hand which Dorkin held. He placed it gently across the other, on the dead man's breast, and stood up.

Dayton was standing, white-faced and trembling, looking down on the victim of his sin. Dorkin touched his arm.

"Mr. Dayton," he said, "I don't envy you your feelings. You must know the enormity of the wrong you have committed. What I wish to tell you now is simply this. No one, except our two selves, knows that you were responsible for this terrible deception. I am willing to keep your secret. But" — as the old man reached out a trembling hand towards him — "you must go up to the cabin and tell Timberley and your niece that you are responsible for their first estrangement. Will you do it?"

"I will, oh, yes, I will."

The old man turned eagerly away and tottered up the trail.

Dorkin gazed after him pityingly. It was not an easy task, that which the old man had to perform, he thought, and still, for the confessor there would be something well worth the winning, he hoped, —

satisfaction and peace of mind, at least. And love, such love as Edna and Timberley had been given, was kind. He sighed, as Timberley's words occurred to him. "Everything pays, sometime." Surely that old man, who had sinned, had paid and was paying. But this world, his world, which uncovers the soul of the transgressor before his eyes and forces him to look upon it, was quick to pity and strong to cure without leaving a scar.

"Does my brother who speaks to the wild things, and they follow, sorrow, because the leaders of the wolf-pack have gone down?"

Dorkin turned quickly, his face aglow.

"Sagawa!" he exclaimed, and held out his hand.

The Algonquin took it, held it, as his dark eyes probed the woodsman's soul. An answering smile heightened the beauty of his features, as he said: —

"Two nights ago, the white wolf spoke to Sagawa of his brother's danger, and he is here. He would have been here sooner, but Gitche Manitou willed otherwise. Now Sagawa's heart is at rest. He has not had to slay the man whose track he followed on the red trail. Manitou, the great and good, saved him that. But Sagawa was with White Hawk, the slayer of his aged brother, Farney, before his spirit sought its long trail, and listened to that which White Hawk wished to tell him."

"White Hawk!" cried Dorkin. "Then it was he who killed Daddy Farney?"

"It was White Hawk," said the Indian. "He

wished to secure the box containing the shiny baubles of gold, which the aged trapper had taken from him eighteen summers ago. White Hawk stole the box, which two nights ago he gave into Sagawa's hands, with a message. Look, the box is here."

From his bosom the Algonquin took a small tin box and handed it to Dorkin.

The woodsman took it wonderingly, and turned it over in his hands. Yes, assuredly, it was the same box which Daddy Farney had told him contained something relating to Willow.

"Sagawa," he asked, "where did this box come from? How did your aged white brother, Farney, come to get possession of it?"

"It belonged to the man and woman who were drowned in Hell's Rapids, near the Basin of White Water, many summers ago," answered the Indian. "White Hawk and his brother, Darbo, were in the canoe with them when it capsized. The man and woman died from exposure, but the baby was saved."

"The baby?"

The Indian smiled. "Little Willow, the Wisp," he said softly; "why, surely, my aged brother, the trapper, told you?"

Dorkin did not answer. He stood, turning the box over and over in his hands. He remembered what the dying trapper had tried to tell him. He remembered what Dayton had told him concerning this man and woman who had lost their lives in

the river near the Basin of White Water. But Dayton had said nothing to him of a baby being left behind. Could he have known? he wondered.

"Sagawa," he said slowly, "Daddy Farney wanted to tell me, — but he died before he could say what I would now hear from your lips."

The Indian folded his arms.

"On the night Sagawa went to the rescue of the white people and brought them to the village of his tribe, a boy baby was born in Farney's cabin. Darwana, White Hawk's mother, was there at the time. But Manitou, seeing the trail ahead rough and uneven, took the little spirit back to the place of sky-spaces and Himself. Darwana, who had a mother's heart, remembered the little one which had been saved from the waters. She took the dead baby away, and left the other in its place."

"And Darwana? Is she still living, Sagawa?"

"She is very old, but she still remembers, as does Sagawa and others of his people," answered the Algonquin.

Dorkin held out his hand.

"Sagawa has always proved himself a man," he said. "He and the brother, whom he has befriended, will keep what they know. He will say nothing until his brother speaks. Is it not so?"

"It is so," replied the Indian.

He looked down at the dead man on the moss.

"Sagawa's brother need not grieve, thus, for his hands are not red with the blood of the wolf who

lies before him," he said, noting the pain in the other's eyes. "It was Darbo who killed him."

"Darbo!" echoed Dorkin.

"Darbo. Sagawa saw it, and Sagawa also saw him kill the leader of the pack, Dalton. Sagawa's canoe was close behind Darbo's. There was another with him. Darbo had sworn to kill Dalton. He fired, and their canoe sought the shadows above the lake, and landed lower down along the shore.

"Sagawa followed. The man with Darbo was not to blame. He could do nothing. Darbo entered the forest. His rifle spoke. Then he crept back again to the other. Sagawa heard him laugh and say to his trail-mate, 'The debt you owed Savage for what he did to your friend, is paid.' That is Savage, outlaw from the Hudson Bay district," pointing to the dead man.

"Then," said Dorkin slowly, gladly, "my men have spilled no blood. Oh, I am glad!"

"And Sagawa is glad with his brother," said the Algonquin. "Hereafter he will stay close beside him, and forget the red trail."

"Ah, Sagawa, that is good news," smiled Dorkin. "And Darbo?" he asked quickly.

"He has gone." The Indian pointed away. "Gone far off to other fields. Sagawa heard him say that, now, he must go far away to the forest of Quebec, for his life here is worth nothing."

"And the other man, the one who was with him, Sagawa?"

"He disappeared into the forest."

"Come," said Dorkin, "let us go up to the cabin."

Dorkin skirted his own cabin and led Sagawa to that of his helper. "My brother must eat and rest," he said; and the Indian answered, "It is well."

He left Sagawa partaking of the food which the smiling French woman placed before him, and telling him that he would speak with him again, went out.

He still carried the little box, and his heart grew heavy as he realized what effect that which he must say might have on two lives, at least.

In the edge of the butternut grove he found the prisoners, still bound, being guarded by his allies from the valley.

He came up and spoke to them.

"You men have been guilty of a grave offence," he said sternly. "I could punish you if I so desired. But," his eyes sweeping the shamed faces of the prisoners, "I happen to know that, in coming here on the errand which has failed, you have been largely the dupes of another. Consequently, I am inclined to show you leniency."

He looked them over again, gravely. Some of the faces were sullen, but the majority of the culprits were, he knew, willing to accept liberty on his terms.

"You have your choice," he told them, "of being sent to jail or of leaving this district forever. Which do you choose?"

"We'll leave," they answered with one accord.

"Very well, then. It must be immediately, remember, and" — he paused, and his voice took on a new timbre — "you will be careful not to return, at any time."

He motioned to Washburn and LaPeer to untie them and passed on up to his cabin. He knew that he had nothing to fear from the men to whom he was giving liberty. Their leader was dead; they feared the law, and they feared him. If only he did not have this other task to perform — he would be happy.

Mr. Dayton met him at the door. The old banker's eyes were red and his face was still white. But there was a new light in his eyes, as he grasped Dorkin's hand and whispered: —

"I have told them *everything*. They have forgiven — I — " He dropped Dorkin's hand and groped his way outside.

Dorkin went to the room in which Timberley lay. Seated beside the bed he found another man, a tall, sallow-faced individual whose eyes were full of wonder as they met his own.

He stood up, gazing at Dorkin in amazement. "Frank," he said huskily, "don't you remember me?"

"Jimmy," cried Dorkin, wringing the hand held out to him — "Jimmy Haight! Who would expect ever to see you here?"

"Jimmy, like myself, has grown considerably

since he came up into this world of yours, Dorkin," said Timberley.

Dorkin bent over and lifted Timberley's hand. "I want to thank you for the letter of warning," he said — "and I want to say that it was brave of you to stick up here so that you might help me at the last."

Timberley smiled. "I owed you something, Dorkin," he said. "Everything pays, sometime, you know."

"Which reminds me that I've got a few thousand dollars belonging to you," Haight informed Dorkin. "Our deceased aunt left it behind. It was rightfully yours, but — well, I got it, and I'm anxious to turn it over to you." He blinked up at Dorkin and took a generous chew of fine-cut.

Dorkin patted his cousin on the shoulder. "Good old Jimmy," he smiled. "I remember you were always funny, in some ways. When we were kids, and used to play marbles, you were always afraid you might cheat, and I'll bet anything, right now," he laughed, turning to Timberley, "Jimmy thinks he's cheated me out of an inheritance."

"By Gad, I have, for that matter," returned Haight. "I've had the use of the money for five years, and how the deuce I'm ever going to pay you the interest —"

"Jimmy, listen." Dorkin pushed Haight down into a seat. "You have n't cheated me out of anything. I knew my lamented aunt left me that

money; knew, also, that it fell into more appreciative hands than mine. The fact of the matter is, Jimmy," he explained, "I get the papers up here, and I saw the announcement of her death. I had already seen the will. I was mighty glad to let you have it. I did n't need it, and you did. Now, then, I don't want to hear any more about it," as Haight opened his mouth to protest. "I've got all I want, and you're not going to deprive me of a pleasure I've enjoyed for five years. So that settles it."

He turned towards the door; then his eyes sought the eyes of Timberley. He smiled at the gladness he saw mirrored there, and went out.

Haight straightened up. He tried to speak and failed. At last he managed it: —

"Tom," he said, "it's all damned queer, is n't it? I go hiking off to God knows where, to try and prove something which will help you win the girl you love. I learn, from Darbo, that another man is impersonating you and trying to get you shot, and I come back to find that Something, infinitely bigger, has taken the work out of my hands. It makes me feel glad that I failed to get what I went after."

He sat stooped over in his seat. "Then," he said softly, "I meet up with him, and — well, you heard what he said?"

Timberley reached out and touched his friend's arm. "Jimmy," he replied, his own voice a little unsteady, "he's what everybody says he is: some man!"

Haight nodded. "I reckon," he returned, —as though speaking to himself, — "I reckon a man's got to be big, in every way, to fit this world of his."

He sank lower in his seat, his long hands clasped together. "I — I feel so damned small, Tom!" he burst out. "Why, I did n't even half understand when you — you told me you owed him something. I thought —"

"I know, Jimmy, what you thought, and you were right too. But I was mistaken."

"And how did you find out that you were mistaken, Tom?"

"Why, something showed me that I could n't just think unworthy thoughts, nor twist my soul to my petty will, up here. Then, quite by accident, I learned that Dorkin was in danger. It surprised me to realize that I wanted to warn him, to help him, but the revelation gave me a peace of mind, a satisfaction that I had not known for a long time; so I stayed, Jimmy, *and tried to belong.*"

"I see," nodded Haight, "you tried to belong. Well, you do belong, Tom, and I'm beginning to hope that I may, too. Now," he said, rising and shaking himself, "I've got to get outside, or I'll cry," and he strode quickly from the room.

Timberley lay back on his pillow and closed his eyes. But he opened them again as a soft cheek touched his own, and a low voice asked, "What are you thinking about, Tom?"

"I was thinking, Edna, dearest," he answered,

reaching for her, "what a glorious place this big forest would make to spend a honeymoon in. What think you, little woman?"

"I—I think so too, Tom," she whispered, and hid her face on his shoulder.

It was late afternoon when Dorkin turned towards the trail leading to Cove Haunt. He had not had an opportunity to speak with Willow since the night before, and he rightly divined that she and Danny had sought their own cabin in the valley.

He glanced about him, as he passed through the grove. His world was at rest, once more. Thank God for that!

The lawless trappers had gone, Dorkin hoped, forever, taking with them Dalton, their dead leader, and Savage, the man who had paid the supreme price for his mistakes.

He drew a deep breath, and looked about him, then his eyes rested on the tin box he carried.

In the seclusion of his own room he had opened that box, and reverently examined its contents: bits of costly jewelry, a curl of hair, tied in faded blue ribbon, a small diary written in a man's hand. That was all; but it was enough. Now he must steel his heart to do what must be done.

He walked slowly, and in deep thought, down the trail, and approached the cabin-glade, softly.

Willow sat in her old place beneath the wild-hop

vine. Her violin lay on her knees. Her brown hands were clasped behind her head. Her grey eyes were turned towards the changing colors above Old Creation Hills.

Dorkin watched her, and into his heart crept a great longing, hunger, loneliness. He knew now, for an assurance, that he wanted this slender, wild woods-girl, to have and to hold for all time. But he knew that destiny had willed otherwise.

He spoke her name, and she turned towards him, a tender light in her big eyes.

"Oh, Dorkin," she cried, "Danny an' me have come home, — home to stay."

He looked down at her and smiled. "Willow," he said, after a short silence, "I have something to tell you."

She reached up and drew him down beside her on the block.

"Willow, the Wisp," he said, a strange huskiness in his voice, "this is what I have to tell you."

And then he told her the story of her birth; of how she came to be the adopted child of Daddy Farney; told her everything, being careful not to omit a single detail.

"This box belongs to you, dear," he said, placing it in her hands. "I took the liberty of looking into it, in search of further information concerning your birth. It is there, in a small diary. Your father, an ardent nature-lover, took your mother up into these Highlands on one of his sojourns — so the little

book tells us. You were born up in the Basin Forest, and you were three weeks old when your mother and father concluded to go back to the city. The canoe was capsized and you alone were saved. The kind-hearted Indians took you to Mother Farney, who had lost her own newly born babe, — and so, Willow, the Wisp —"

He paused, an ache in his throat.

"And so, Willow," he concluded, "the fortune which your parents left behind, and which Edna Marsh inherited, is rightfully yours."

She looked up into his face. Her own face had gone white. Her brown fingers were caressing the curl of hair, tied with faded ribbon.

She smiled and laid her hand on his.

"Then, Dorkin, I can have all the money which *she* has now, an' live in that big, beautiful home in the city, an' have servants an' automobiles an' — an'—"

His heart hurt at the eagerness in her voice, but he smiled, gaily, and answered: —

"Everything you most desire, you may have now, Willow. You are rich."

"But she," said the girl, "she will be poor?"

Dorkin nodded. "Yes, she will be poor. But she would never keep what is not rightfully hers."

"And she knows all, Dorkin?"

"Not yet. We will go up and tell her now. Come."

He rose and held out his hand.

"Wait," she whispered, "oh, wait."

He waited, watching her, more than ever longing to sweep her close and hold her so forever. She was looking towards the glowing sunset, above Old Creation Hills.

"The bars are down, Dorkin," she whispered; then, slowly, she stood up and reached for him, gropingly.

"Oh, man, man!" she sobbed. "Do you think for one minute I would take *her* money an' all she has had for her own? Do you think I would take it from her?"

"It is yours, Willow."

"It is hers," said the girl, "and *yours*."

"Mine?" he echoed, wondering.

"You love her, Dorkin. She loves you. You two are mates. I — I am satisfied; I am glad, right glad. I would not exchange my world, here, for all the riches in that big city, Dorkin."

He tried to speak, but failed.

"Dorkin," she said wistfully, "you believe what I say, don't you? I have all — all I want. I have my forest an' Danny. We have our little cabin, an' the lights that lift an' fade above the dear old hills."

His heart gave a great, glad bound.

"And I, Willow, the Wisp," he whispered. "Do I not count for something?"

"You?" she cried, "you? Oh, Dorkin, you count fer everythin'; but I can't have you — *you belong to her*."

He drew her gently to him. "I belong to you,

Willow, the Wisp," he answered. "And you belong to me. Nobody in the wide world can come between us."

The lights were fading above Old Creation Hills, when, at last, he led her towards the trail leading to his cabin. Her face turned to the lifting colors was no longer pensive, but glad and satisfied.

"Dorkin," she said softly, "we won't tell *her* what you told me, an' we won't tell Danny. Nobody need ever know — except ourselves."

"Nobody need know except ourselves," he answered.

With a little cry she reached up and drew his face down to hers.

"Mates, Dorkin, forever and ever," she whispered.

"Forever and ever, Willow, the Wisp."

And through the scented dusk, they passed along the trail to happiness.

THE END

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